

**CLOUD OF UNKNOWING**  
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Transfiguration Sunday  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Our nation has entered a cloud of unknowing. It can be a terrifying place. In the cloud of unknowing we wonder: what does the future portend?

Once upon a time, Moses faced a daunting future. How could he build a community, which is to say, how could he build a nation out of a bunch of stubborn and constantly complaining people? Moses entered the cloud of unknowing.

*The LORD said to Moses, "Come up on the mountain and wait there. I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment for your people." The glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain. Moses entered the cloud. (Exodus 24:12-18)*

Our nation has entered a cloud of unknowing. In the cloud of unknowing we wonder: what does the future portend?

Jesus faced a daunting future. How could he stay true to the path of love with the Roman cross casting a dark shadow? And how can we stay true when our land is filled with hatred, fear-mongering and threats on all sides? What does the future portend?

*Jesus led Peter and James and his brother John up a high mountain. And there Jesus was transfigured. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.*

*Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared, talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it's good we are here. Let me make three huts, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

*Suddenly a cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud a voice spoke, "This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!"*

*The disciples fell to the ground, overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up. Do not be afraid." They left the mountain and returned to the valley. (Matthew 17:1-9)*

Our nation has entered a cloud of unknowing. It's a terrifying place to be. To Moses it was like a devouring fire. Would he come out alive?

For Peter, James and John, it knocked them to their knees. Would they come out alive?

We have entered a cloud of unknowing. Many in our nation wonder: will we come out alive?

Mountains and streams wonder: will we be destroyed bit by bit?

Immigrant families wonder: will we be rounded up like cattle and deported? Will our families be broken apart?

Jews wonder: will our cemeteries and synagogues be desecrated?

Muslims wonder: will we be scorned, scape-goated, ostracized and interred like Japanese Americans once were?

Blacks wonder: will our voting rights be suppressed?

Transgender persons wonder: will we be bullied and stigmatized?

Coalminers wonder: will our jobs really come back? Will our health insurance hold?

Children wonder: will we have good schools?

Journalists wonder: will we be labeled enemies of the people as Jews once were in Nazi Germany?

Our nation has entered a cloud of unknowing. In the cloud of unknowing we wonder: what does the future portend?

But it's not only our nation. For some sitting among us it's more personal than that. For some the cloud of unknowing is the shadow of death hanging over their heads.

How can I go on now that my beloved has died? Will this grief ever subside?

What does the future portend?

For some sitting among us, the cloud of unknowing is personal. How long can I live with this disease gnawing at my flesh and bones? Will I walk again? Will I see again? Will I ever hear my name again?

What does the future portend?

Will my husband, my wife, my child, my grandchild, my bother, my sister, my aunt, my uncle, my niece, or my cousin make it through hurt, sickness, affliction, or addiction?

What does the future portend?

I've been in that cloud more than once. My family's been in that cloud more than once. Most of you, if not all of you, have been in that cloud. It's terrifying.

What does the future portend?

We don't know. So we must trust someone or something. And so we have come together in this place once again to wait and listen. For the cloud of unknowing is also a time of surprise.

In the darkness, facing a daunting task, Moses heard a voice. A word shone in the darkness like a lamp. It revealed a way for his people to live in freedom, civility and peace. Yes, the future would be hard. But that Word would sustain them through trouble and turmoil.

In the darkness, facing the cross, Jesus heard a voice. A word shone in the darkness like a lamp. *No matter what others say, no matter how hard the way, you are my Beloved.*

In the darkness, facing an unknown future, Peter, James and John heard a voice. *Be not afraid. Get up. Let's be on our way.* Yes, the future would be hard. But the Word would sustain them through trouble and turmoil.

It's not an easy way. It's the way of the cross. It's the way of love and therefore it's the way of suffering.

They left the mountain and returned to the valley.

The valley below was full of frightened people, sick people, hurting and hungry people, disfigured bodies and distraught spirits. It would be a daunting task to bring hope, light and healing to their people, to their nation. We know that feeling.

It would be a daunting task. But love would guide them. Love would give them fierce hope and courage. They would not be alone. That Word would sustain them.

And what is that Word?

*You are my Beloved.*

It's true. But don't let it go to your head. Let it go to your heart.

*You are my Beloved. Be not afraid. I will never leave you or forsake no matter how rough the way may be.*

That Word would sustain them. The gates of hell cannot withstand it.

We too trust that Word. We stake our lives on it. *Walk with me and build the land that God has planned where love shines through.*

No, we can't be everywhere with everyone at every time. But we can be with some.

And you are. I see it and hear it all the time.

You bring a meal to a family in distress. You knit a prayer shawl. You call a heartbroken mother. You sit with a frightened child. You wrap the shivering in a warm blanket. You give clothing and shoes to those who have little. You march with Muslims and offer shelter to the homeless. You stand with LGBT persons. You welcome the immigrant and pledge support.

We have entered a cloud of unknowing. It's a terrifying place to be. But it's also a place of surprise—a place where the ordinary is transfigured into the extraordinary. A place where fear is transfigured into courage. A place where light breaks in.

I don't know how the light comes. All I know is that it does. We enter the cloud of unknowing. We wait. We listen.

*You are my Beloved. Be not afraid.*

If you haven't heard that Word this morning, I'm pretty sure you soon will.

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**Hymn 177**  
"I Will Come to You"