

JESUS AND DARWIN
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Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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The Old Testament lesson for today is from Exodus. Here's the first verse. *Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand. His face shone because he had been talking with God.* (Exodus 34:29-35)

The gospel lesson for today is the so-called transfiguration of Jesus. Like Moses, Jesus shone with radiant light. There are many ways to see this story. Today I'm looking at it through the eyes of Charles Darwin. Let's see where that takes us.

We don't know if this story is factual. But it sure is a true revelation—a story told to knock our socks off and make us wonder just how much light is in this thing we call human. Unlike other species we are born to become something more than we are.

You know about Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop. You know how Peter, James, and John were awestruck at the sight of Jesus glowing with dazzling light. You know how badly they wanted to enshrine that moment and never leave. What you might not know is what happened the next day.

The next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a crowd met Jesus and a man shouted, "Teacher, I beg you. Look at my son, my only child. Something suddenly seizes him. He shrieks. It convulses him. He foams at the mouth; it mauls him and scarcely leaves him. (Luke 9:28-45)

This past week I've been reading Jedekiah Purdy's book, *Beyond Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, a newly named era designating humankind's dramatic alteration of the natural world over the past 200 years. I've also been reading *Undeniable: Evolution and the Science of Creation* by Bill Nye, the science guy.

And so for the past week I've been reveling once again in the glorious tale of evolution unfolding on this planet over four and a half billion years from lifeless minerals, to single cell amoebas, to multiple celled creeping, crawling, swimming, soaring critters and creatures right up to our own pottery making, hymn singing, photo taking, infinitely creative species.

Humans create and destroy like no other. We are god-like.

Whether or not biological evolution has reached its end in the human species, another kind of evolution is already underway. It's embodied in flesh but it's more than flesh and brain tissue. It's more than chemistry.

We are now witnessing what some call cultural or spiritual evolution. And just as with biological evolution, choices matter. Some choices lead to extinction; some to transformed life.

And that brings us to the gospel lesson for today.

Once upon a time Jesus stood upon a mountaintop conversing with Moses and Elijah, those historic giants of the Jewish tradition. Each had fed the hungry with bread, as would Jesus. Each had liberated their people from oppression, as would Jesus. Each had fought for freedom, as would Jesus. Each had used the sword to slaughter infidels. Jesus would not.

Jesus would practice non-violence and love his enemies to death. A new way of being human was emerging. And sure enough, today compassion is arising all around the world out of many old traditions and arenas.

Moses and Elijah were conditioned by tribalism as most of us are. Still, Jesus did not turn his back on them or his tradition. He stood in it, conversed with it and transfigured it. He pruned the old tradition so the vision of universal kinship as portrayed by the likes of Jonah and Isaiah could blossom and flourish. He pruned the tradition and so must we.

On the mountain, Peter, James and John saw something their eyes could hardly believe. Their eyes were heavy with sleep but they stayed awake and saw a dazzling light.

There's more to this world than meets a sleepy eye. And that's one lesson for us. If we stay awake we may see grandeur.

In the 19th century, Darwin was wide-awake and caught a glimpse of the natural world few had seen. The world was suddenly transfigured before his eyes. It dazzled him.

Darwin discovered that none can exist alone. Life is a web. One cannot live without the other. All arises from One and in the One all are whole and holy. In the light of the natural world, Darwin saw love at work way more than "survival of the fittest."

Creation and all creatures are the Beloved of God.

To be loved and to know it is not a status to enshrine. It's not meant to go to your head. It's meant to go to your heart.

Jesus left the mountain.

In the valley below, he met a parent whose child was disfigured by evil, tortured and tormented, not unlike many children and adults today disfigured by poverty, sex trafficking, profiling, disease, drugs and sheer neglect.

Please, look at my child, the parent begged.

Jesus looked. And just like that, the child was liberated and made whole.

Sometimes we stand on the mountain or sit in church and bask in the light of love. But there's also a hurting world. And that's the other lesson for us today: we are invited to see the world with eyes of love—to see and to make a choice.

And when we look, we just may see that the radiant, beloved child on the mountain and the broken, beloved child in the valley are one and the same.

Please, look at my child.

Jesus looked and saw himself.

And maybe that's why the Beloved's table is so wide.