

Today we are using the story of the transfiguration as our text to engage us in the third and final expression of our spiritual journey. The last two weeks we have engaged with two different ways of understanding the world and our lives within it. One that is externally focused, that we called the aesthetical life – this is a world of immediacy and excitement. Boredom is the enemy as we move from one shiny object to the other, anything to keep us distracted and titillated. When we realize how unfulfilling that way is, how tiring and empty, we began to look for meaning and significance inward. We take on responsibility and commitment. We begin to define and frame the world around us according to whether or not it fits our internal conception of it. We can conceive of what a good marriage is, or a good professional, or a good parent – and we begin to live likewise. Our satisfaction in life is based on whether or not we are achieving our expectations, or whether the world is achieving our expectations – never really questioning whether or not our expectations – our conception of the world – is a good one. But when we realize that we are not the framers of this world, that the world will not fit our ideal, nor that we can even fit our own ideal for ourselves – trouble begins. At worst we become tyrants, pushing and cajoling and forcing everyone around us, including ourselves, to fit our ideal world – enslaved by “oughts” and “shoulds” that are self-defined because that’s the way I grew up, or

that's the way it "SHOULD" be. At best we become nobly indifferent, understanding perhaps deep down that we will never achieve that happy ideal, and yet unwilling to abandon it out of shame or pride. Shame because our loved ones know us a certain way, and how would we look if we realized we were wrong and wanted to change? Pride because we never like to admit that we were wrong. We see the world running amok and we silently accept it, shaking our heads and sighing – maybe reminiscing about the way things were. It is here that maybe a sense of resignation begins to tug at the edges of our soul, a gentle prompting to let go of this self-constructed identity, of this self-imposed way of being. Maybe I should just let go?

This is an uncomfortable question. It would seem that there is no way out, no real alternative. That we have run into a brick wall of sorts. I've lived my life as an aesthete, valuing external things – but I could never fill myself, I always wanted more – and I was very unhappy. So I turned from that path, I made a choice, I took on commitment, I took on responsibility – I turned inward and found my internal values of good and bad and I lived up to them as best I could. But no matter how hard I tried, I could never live up to what I really sensed was good – I always fall short. I found myself plagued by 'oughts' and 'shoulds' and again, very unhappy. But what else is there? External things don't make me

happy, internal things don't make me happy. Are we doomed to be unhappy? Forced to just put a good face on things and drag out this existence the best we can? Never to be significant? Never to feel fulfilled? Always thwarted by nagging emptiness? Always seeking a false sense of significance for our lives? Plato called the human being a "leaky vessel," always trying to fill itself with meaning and significance, yet never being full. Is it a choice between a false sense of significance (whether external or internal) and nothing?

According to Kierkegaard and many of the spiritual greats that is exactly the choice we must face. Blessed resignation, absurd as it may be. We come to an intense little point where we find that we are questioning our very "self." Sometimes it's brought on by some crisis in our lives, perhaps the sudden loss of whatever it was that we held to be so significant for our lives. Sometimes the choice becomes apparent to us through the normal living of our lives – or maybe a well timed sermon that makes us think. This resignation can be a negative thing, it can lead us to a depressive, empty meaningless. Vanity, vanity all is vanity! Or, I guess I think of the beatnik movement, perhaps unfairly. But that is one way to dive into this resignation – a terrible, even suicidal, rejection of all things, ultimately even the self.

But the resignation can also be a positive thing. Positive when the loss of our self-constructed self begins to identify with God's 'self.' Make no mistake, this is just as absurd as the negative resignation – but here instead of losing all meaning, suddenly we are filled by all meaning. Kierkegaard called this a “leap of faith.” Suddenly our significance is not based on our own self-construction, but is based on our relationship with the divine. You are a child of God, a unique and lovely creature. According to Jesus it is in exactly giving up of ourselves that we find eternal life. I don't think he meant that self-destructively, or nihilistically – he meant it as life-giving. Let go of all the bonds that constrain who you really are, whether external or internal, choose to embrace the divine. Paul famously said, “I, but not I, rather Christ in me.” This was his expression of ‘self, who is not his own self’ – not the self that was trained as a Pharisee – but the self that was transformed into the image of Christ.

Is this hard? This leap? Very hard! But also very easy. Remember when we read about Jesus saying that we all have to bear our cross, but than in the next breath ‘my burden is easy, my yoke is light.’ Suddenly that makes a lot of sense. It is extremely difficult to make that leap, to make that choice – but once made, it

seems far easier to live. A few years back during Christmas I ate something that was a bit off, and I started to feel nausea...and I struggled and I struggled not to throw up...hours I laid on the couch, barely moving, not wanting to incite that awful moment. Misery upon misery. All day. Late that night I couldn't hold it anymore, I ran to the bathroom. Immediately after it was over – I felt SO much better. I couldn't believe how much better I felt – if I had only just done that hours ago, I wouldn't have had to ruin my Christmas laying on the couch all day in misery. How's that for an analogy of the Spiritual Journey!

I can't say much more than this, because I haven't moved beyond it. I suffer with spiritual nausea. A clinging to my old self....walk out....

That is the path to God.