

Children's Lesson: Shining with Light from Inside

(Hold a flashlight under my chin)

Do you play with flashlights? Have you ever pretended to make scary faces? And maybe then tell creepy ghost stories?

The story of Jesus today is neither scary nor creepy and certainly need not be frightening!

Jesus is with three of his disciples on a mountain and they happen to find two very old friends of Jesus: Moses and Elijah. These two have been in heaven for hundreds of years, and it was taught that when they returned to earth, that would be the beginning of the kingdom of heaven on earth!

But that's what Jesus taught from the very beginning of his ministry: The kingdom of heaven is among you!

And in today's story, as these three people are talking, and the disciples are watching and listening, Jesus begins to look differently. He begins to glow!

If you and I are playing with flashlights, we can make faces glow because the light shines on us and we reflect that light. It bounces off our faces and into your eyes.

But Jesus' light is different!. It doesn't bounce off of him, it comes from inside of him! And the disciples seeing this, realize Jesus is not just human, he is divine, the Son of God. In fact, they hear a voice from heaven say just that: "This is my beloved son! Listen to him!"

That light sounds pretty amazing. But I want to do an experiment with you. I think we can see just a little bit of that light in each other.

I need a mother who will experiment with me..... All you have to do is close your eyes for a moment and then open your eyes and look at your child. OK?

Please turn and face the congregation...I want you to close your eyes, so you can't see your child for just a minute. Now I want you to imagine looking at your child. See your child in your mind. See your child with your heart. And I want you to feel how much you love this child... you are so grateful for this child... you miss this child... this child brings you so much happiness and fulfillment... Feel that love. Feel that love as strongly as you can possibly feel it. In a moment – but not yet - I want you to open your eyes and look at your child and using only your smile and your eyes and your whole face – but no words - I want you to let all that love and happiness shine forth on your child – and we will watch your face.... Open your eyes....

Did you see it? There was just a bit of light – just a bit of joy... just a bit of delight and it was like light. She glowed with so much appreciation. Mother was radiant!

We can all do that. Every day! We have the light of God – the Spirit of God in us – yes, we reflect God’s love, but also some of that love changes inside of us and we become just a bit more like Jesus!

What would this world be like if, instead of scary faces and grumpy faces and angry faces and – the worst of all – “I just don’t care” faces... what if we let the light of Jesus shine... even with one person... every day...?

What if that loving light said, “I love you... I so love you... You are my delight!”? I think this would be a different world.

What if just once every day we said to someone with words or with our faces, “I see a bit of God in you!”? This would be a different world! The kingdom of heaven has come near!

Let’s pray... Shine, Jesus... Shine upon us with mercy... Shine upon us with love. Shine within us and help us to shine. Oh, let us delight in each other....Amen!

Lesson for Older Children (Adults)

By the grace of God, may the Spirit light a spark in you...

Is the God you worship dangerous?

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Let us go to the mountain with Jesus, Peter, James and John and find a God we may not expect.

The disciples pause. There are others on the mountain! Jesus approaches two others and greets them as if he knows them.

“It’s good you are here,” he says. “The time has come. The kingdom of heaven is near!

“Moses, you have brought the Law of God from a mountain like this one. It is good Law. I do not come to change it. I come to fulfill it.

“Moses, you have revealed the mercy of God that delivers the nations, all nations from slavery and oppression. You free the people, even if it means a long journey through a dangerous wilderness.

“Your work is done. Mine now begins.

“Elijah, thank you for coming. You bravely asserted there is only one God. You stood your ground against tremendous opposition to challenge the lies and threats and empty promises of authorities who would deceive, manipulate, and exploit the people.

“I regret you needed to use violence sometimes. I renounce that. But I need your miracles. I too need to feed the hungry and raise the dead.

“Your presence means that the time has come. The kingdom is at hand. Your work is nearly finished. Mine has just begun.”

Now, the disciples could not hear what was being said. But they knew what Jesus had said – about why he was here. And they knew what it would mean when Moses and Elijah returned. Everything I said in the dialog could be inferred from scripture and tradition.

Peter, James and John were three disciples who were ready to see a deeper revelation. The others were not. But even at that, what they saw with their senses was covered over by a cloud. And what they thought might happen was transformed by words from heaven that said, “This is my Beloved Son. Listen to him!”

Jesus had heard these words before at his baptism. Now there were witnesses to these words. Soon there would be more witnesses to their meaning.

“Oh, it’s good, my Lord, to be here. Let’s raise tents, like we do at the Feast of Booths! This is the annual fall Festival celebrating how our Lord provides for us and delivers us. This is the Festival like we have never celebrated it! Now the reign of God returns to the throne of David. God does not reign in Rome or Babylon or Washington or Moscow or Beijing... Let us stay here!”

The disciples had been given a vision. It was strengthened by the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Who would believe it? But it was clouded over, only a glimpse. Yes, this was the fulfillment of promise. Yes, this was a sign of God's presence, light, purpose, and promise.

It is tempting to stay with tradition, the God we think we know, the promises we believe, the rituals that give us meaning and structure.

Soon Pastor Wallace will leave us; he will disappear like Moses and Eijah. And we will be left to figure this all out. It is good to be here, to worship as we used to and believe as we want to...

But there is this voice.... And we must listen. There is this Presence.... And we must follow. There is this Light.... And we must see in new ways.

We must tell the others. They will know as we know. They will understand as we understand.

But Jesus said firmly, "No... Not yet. Not until the work is really done and more light has come, and the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

"Until they see it all, they will want to weave strands and threads of understanding into something that for them makes sense. But law and violence are not my ways. They are not me. This revelation has been granted to you. But

there is more. We must go down from here, back to the valley, where the people are, where the needs are, where the kingdom of heaven is near.

“It’s not over. It’s just beginning. It will make sense in Jerusalem, after the trial and the crucifixion and the resurrection. Epiphany must lead to Lent.

“Or there will be no Easter!

“But you may stay here... or follow me. “

But the words from heaven still rang in their ears, “Listen to him!”

So, they went down. And it was... only the beginning.

Liturgically, this is a turning point in our church year and our story. In Advent we had expectation. The Messiah was coming. At Christmas we had reception: The Messiah had come. In Epiphany all that was behind this holy gift was just beginning to be revealed... Light after light.

Until this Light. Transfiguration Light... and a new direction. Turning to Jerusalem. The season, the journey, the darkness of Lent. Light was turning more and more toward darkness. Promise was turning more and more toward conflict.

And this innocent baby, now grown and baptized and blessed, is beginning to look dangerous. What he is doing is dangerous. He feeds the hungry and thereby could

be feeding people for a revolution. He is healing the sick, and thereby is strengthening the population with hope. He is setting captives free. This appears to be in direct defiance of authorities, both religious and political.

These authorities will stop him. He is dangerous. He will die.

Is your God, the God you worship, the God you follow, dangerous?

Has anyone tried to stop your journey with Jesus? Has anyone opposed you? Challenged you? If not, why not?

Have we somehow domesticated Jesus, kept him as the helpless sacrificial lamb, insisted that he remain the good shepherd?

Is it true that your journey with Jesus does not ask anything of you? Does Jesus forgive you, whether you repent or not? Does Jesus claim you as a divine individual, a divine nation, without regard for who is in and who is out? Is your God an inclusive God, or do you keep track of numbers, assuring that you keep the numbers of “others” down? Do you welcome those who are most like you; have you only regard for who is in and who is out, those who fit, those whom you might benefit from, profit from?

Perhaps the cross is a sacrificial burden Jesus bore, but we don't have to? Jesus bore it, so that we do not have to? Even though he told us unless we take up our

cross and follow ... that is live like him – with the same spirit, the same love, the same selflessness... we cannot be his disciples?

Maybe we could just stay on the mountain and have feasts and hold rituals and count our blessings and be a little light. Or a burned out bulb.

“Go back,” Eijah told Elisha. But he would not, could not. “I will follow you.”

Are we blinded by the gods we have created in our own image? Or do we see a different light? A dangerous light. A light that demands change and creates change, not to destroy us, but to birth us. Emerging from the womb, we cry out. Life is so bright! But here is life in the light!

Emerging from the tomb, something old of us that imitates death, selfishness, cold-heartedness.... Darkness... is left behind. There is life in the light.

Let’s go down.... To the ghettos and refugee camps and bombed out hospitals, and the cities flooded by salt water, and the desiccated farm fields, where farmers grow crops for the first world but cannot feed their own families.

Elijah told Elisha he had the option to stay, but Elijah was moving on. Elisha had no option.

Moses told the Israelites they could be free, but they would have to cross the Red Sea and they would have to journey deeper into the wilderness. They followed....into the light.

Jesus told the twelve they were to keep quiet – briefly. And then he sent them beyond the borders of home and nation and safe religious family... in order to preach good news... live good news... and even in some cases face martyrdom.

That sounds dangerous to me.

Is the God you worship and follow dangerous? If not, why not?