

Fresh Visions

February 14, 2010

St. Paul's - Richmond United Church

Last Sunday After Epiphany

Transfiguration Sunday

Luke 9:28-36

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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Vistas are crucial to our seeing. Vistas create our perception. Vistas and geography give us metaphors for living.

I grew up on the Prairies and I could see for miles. A friend said I had flat land thinking. By that he meant, I was always extending my perception of the world. There was no end to the geography. I moved on to the next rise in the ground, looking far and wide. In a sense there was nothing that blocked my vision - there was no end in sight - so let us move on and on into the unknown.

Geography is a funny idea. We locate ourselves in place. For some geography is so defining that it leads to wars and conflict. Think of the issues in Israel and the surrounding area. Think of tribal areas and conflict we see there.

Our country struggles with geography. What does it mean to be a nation? We are just across the river from a Francophone area, marked by geography. A different reality is experienced when you cross that river, a different culture. The same when you cross the US border.

Geography creates a mind set. What does it mean to own land? Not all cultures have that sense of private ownership. Some groups understand that no one owns land, it is shared. Yet for others private ownership is crucial. What these attitudes do is create tensions in communities. We must learn to hear what is at stake in the different issues of geography. Think about the issues of land claims and how that runs through the Canadian reality.

Geography can expand our consciousness, or it can limit our vision. Travel can expand our consciousness. Yet some people never leave, and we use the word parochial to describe them when they seem to be narrow minded.

Some places of geography dominate the meaning of the world. Living in Paris, near Toronto, it was said that it was twice as far to come to Paris as it was to go from Paris to Toronto. Cities can dominate and determine the meaning of even rural geography. We knew this in this community.

Historically cities created agriculture as we know it. Cities moved us out of hunting and gathering consciousness into urban consciousness.

The issue in Luke is one of geography. He is writing to a new generation of Christians who were mostly gentile. The boundaries of the location of the kingdom of God had been moved from the center of Jerusalem to the Greek and Roman world. It is an expansion of sacred space to the whole world. Rather than sacred space being identified with one place or one shrine, Luke says God is everywhere - all is sacred.

Luke's narrative follows the way of Jesus, despite the dangers, to the ends of the world. In this dramatic pause on the mountain, the end of the story is given. Jesus faces death, yet continues moving to Jerusalem because of his trust in God's redemptive power.

The image of wholeness and peace guide Jesus' movement toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem, however, is not the end of the story, for at the resurrection experiences Luke adds - "this is the gospel for all the people." The geography of the way is moved to the whole world.

Getting to that point is not a straight ahead movement. The kingdom is here yet peace is not. This is because we live toward a healed community. We still experience our brokenness, making us hesitate and sometimes despair. We are caught in parochial visions. There are some in our world who want to impose their narrow vision of reality on us. Some have defined their vision as the only truth. To expand our vision - our geography we need to be grounded in hope.

Luke uses the story of the mountain top experiences to give us a larger vista. This story is grounded in Moses' experience on the mountain. His encounter with God was overwhelming and life changing. So, to this day we speak of mountain top experiences as those moments which are life changing, when we see the world and our lives through new glasses or images. We are transfixed and transformed.

Luke uses the character of Elijah to move his geographic image. Elijah is an early prophet who represented the purification tradition. He has a dual function of priest and teacher. Such roles give the cornerstone of faith, the Torah or the good news of God's presence in the world.

By bringing these representatives of Judaism to the same spot as Jesus, Jesus now represents the past and the transformed future. For Luke, Jesus sums up all the past teachings and is the point of departure for the new history. He is the hero and the founding teacher who presents God in new ways.

We see this in the phrase "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him." The creative energy Jesus gained allows him to become even more integrated with God's vision of possibilities for the world. By following the lure of God, even when it meant his own death, Jesus gives us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God on earth. By putting on Jesus we engage in this creative transformation.

Our society and culture conspire against letting this story ground and lead us. In fact we forget that stories are true even when they are fiction. A line in *The Life of Pi* captures this, "dry yeastless factuality," is the mantra of our time. "Give me the facts" deadens the spirit. The word of imagination and religion gives a better story. Again from the *Life of Pi*, "I have a better story that will make you believe in God."

Still we return to yeastless factuality, looking for some immovable images. Luke shows this in "Let us build some shrines or idols to this moment," Peter says. "Let us capture the moment and bottle it." He wants to make the mountain into a monument. A story turned into fact or concrete. He wants to

create sacred tents. The danger is that he wants to make those tents into fixed moments, sacred cows, finished and complete, nothing more needed. He wants to limit geography to one place and one time.

It is only later, the text tells us, that they knew what the significance was. It was coming down from the mountain top and engaging in life where everyone lives that they learn the significance. They jump into life because their vision has been expanded. They have the energy to engage in the tough stuff of life. Having their geography expanded they live free without roots, for the roots we have is the story of God's continuous work of redemption.

Worship helps get fresh visions. We come to participate in the stories that make us believe in God. We come to expand our vision. We gather to enjoy the splendour of God, and come to let God into our souls. The story moves us on.

Orthodox Church teaches that adoration, worship, is to delight in the friendship of the Lover of humankind, to be open to the fullness of creation and the joy of love. We are called to transformation. It is about Passion, as we move toward the season of passion.

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