

Belovedness (edited)

Sermon for Transfiguration day

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Matthew 17: 1-9

Beloveds, let me start with a joke.

If Christ appeared radiant in glory, to a Unitarian freshly graduated from Harvard, he might quietly adjust his glasses, shake his head and say: ‘Fantastic. Now, how does this help me love my neighbor on Monday morning?’ Stay with me to find out.

The scripture of this Sunday says: While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Este es mi Hijo amado en quien me he complacido; a El oíd.

The Father has spoken: this is my Son. As Unitarians this relationship means we can identify God as a father of all of us, not limited to a divine relationship, or one where the Son is only Divine, where we all can call God as ours.

The trinity defines three persons and one God, but Unitarians are often denouncing this as a distraction. Unitarians in their adventure for reason, find that God is calling Jesus, Son, just as God is also calling us their sons.

You, wherever or whomever you are, however you dress or however you consider God is, I would like to consider with you, personally, intimately, what does it mean to be a beloved. Yes, and this weekend is Saint Valentines day. What does it mean to be beloved in your hearts by an invisible God?

First of all, we are already inside this relationship. I could speak about Peter, James and John. We could explore the cloud and the mountain, or why his face —shone like the sun— and his clothes were bright as light. But talking about this might distract us from the words of that voice, beloved, a voice that I want to invite each of you to listen, as this voice wants us to listen to Jesus.

This time, Rev Mark has asked me to preach this gospel with the topic of soteriology, or, in other words, the study of salvation. But doesn't mention salvation, I mean, compare when Jesus said to the good thief in Luke, chapter 23, "I truly tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Or when Jesus tells in the same gospel the story of Lazarus, when he and the rich Absalom died. Lazarus was with Abraham, and the rich wasn't invited. When the rich man begs, Abraham replies : "They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them". Community, belovedness is where I find salvation, this voice that wants us to listen to Jesus and, to reset your hearts coming down from the mountain.

II.

Now let me detain a little on Moses and Elijah. Two men represented often in the Jewish tradition. Moisés and Elías, just as much as Paul or Thomas Aquinas for other Christians. Because, the Bible was formed as a book, and it include letters, or poetry like Song of Songs. In this case, I don't understand why is Jesus included with Elijah and Moses, prophets.

He could have appeared with King David and King Salomon. I mean, Jesus showed a king, right? Or with John the Baptist, his Best Friend Forever or BFF, as a much more present figure in the memory of their disciples or readers. Actually, he could have appeared with a figure like Abraham and Isaac, to show connection to the patriarchs and to a genealogy.

The idea that we have of Moses, maybe based on the 1956 movie, The Ten Commandments, or through the Prince of Egypt, animated, with the song Hero by Mariah Carey is probably not what Moses meant here. No, Moses is the prophet par excellence, by excellence, for this figure is not the opener of the seas, but the one and only that talked to God. The biggest role for the prophetic tradition. Not a reader of the future, but as someone God would have celebrated Valentines Day.

With Elijah, let us remember that he appears in the two books of Kings. Last Thursday, in our Spanish Speaking Bible Group, we wondered on Why Elijah? Well, he was the one sent during a famine, when Jezebel was persecuting the prophets of

God...Maybe this is more about Elijah's, being taken away by a chariot of fire. Because, like Jesus, the writers wanted a Hollywood and glorious ending.

Community, let me add another symbol. These two prophets also received and had key roles in mountains. Moses received the ten commandments on the top of Mount Sinai and Elijah challenged the fifty prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. Now let me jump to the next part of this sermon.

III.

If I could find myself making this transfiguration more visible, more here and now I want to invite you all to find yourselves in the text. I would love to be Peter. And this Peter, me, wants to stay in the mountain, to make three tents and get comfy. He says in the moment of most light and holiness, I quote: "it is good for us to be here." Hmm... Where in your life have you experienced this? I am sure we have been, like Peter, on the top of an experience that we don't want to let go. A party, an ecstasy where you dance the last dance before closing, a moment of supreme joy where you don't need anything and the sunset is in the right place. A moment watching Golden Girls or a shout of joy when a baby is born. Because it is good for us to be here.

And it is good for us to be here, says Peter, and I can say that too about this Sunday at church. I came from North Andover and I could say that about the music that our music director plays for us. I missed you all. I could say it is good to be here surrounded by the plaques of faithful people, beloveds too. I could say it is good to be here with the people I love to see every Sunday at coffee hour, with a cup. I could say it is good to be here surrounded by heat, the plants that the church administrator has been planting or the prayers that have been said through the years and have become liturgy. And like Peter, I feel the same. It is good to be here, because we seek that which feels good. You know better, beloveds, when we want to hold an experience dearly. But like Jesus, he came, he touched the disciples and now he is touching us. The times are changing, said Bob Dylan, and Jesus is here, with Moses and Elijah to tell us: Get up and do not be afraid.

IV.

If you could see Jesus, who is he standing side by side today? Does your vision of Jesus have your grandmother on each side? Ah, what would you feel like? If Moses and Elijah were important for the reader of this gospel, I wonder if you could see yourself within your own people. Would you see on one side the person who introduced you to this faith? or, would you see to the other side, the person whom you loved the most? Who are the people we want to see when we leave this world? I want to see my chihuahuas and my grandmother Stella.

I don't have a way to assure you salvation. I don't even think Unitarians should worry about solving the conflicts between Calvinists, Lutherans or Catholics. My reading of Soteriology, Salvation, is one where you expect the love you gave, here and now, then, later and after. Salvation for me is belovedness. Again, where you experience transfiguration of your love, during your lifetime, and not in a promise after. A beloved voice that is made out of the people that loved you first. The two people that will wait for us side by side with Jesus.

Get up and do not be afraid of telling the world you are in love. This is Saint Valentines Day. Do not be afraid you have fallen in love with Jesus, because he can be our beloved. Do not be afraid to share your love and to touch people with it. Your salvation is not a discussion of doctrine, of one God or three persons. Your salvation becomes our salvation when the words of Peter: it's good to be here can be the words of all the people of God: the poor, migrants, the people of color, the persecuted, the imprisoned.

We might never in our lives see Jesus in a vision, as a man transfigured like sun, clothed with light. I can promise you that. But you might be the only time someone can see Jesus. And it is good to be here, today, together, like Peter, John and James. But it is also good to get down the mountain, or the hill, or the stairs, to transfigure yourselves into beloveds.

Yes, community, my idea of salvation is that we either save us together until everyone gets what they need. Until then none of us could say this with authority. You are all beloved sons and daughters of God. You were brought to this world and, we also had to be taken out of our own kind of mountains, to get up, to call God our

beloved, to treat God as if every day of your life is a Saint Valentine's adventure. To come to the interior, only to share it with the exterior. Do not hide your love, just as the voice is inviting us to listen to our teacher. Get up and do not be afraid. Each day is your opportunity to fall in love with your beloved. And in all the people you will encounter every day, your beloved shall find you.

I pray for each of you. I pray you fall in love, everyday, with a vision of a world — wide enough— where each living being can say: It is good to be here. Be not afraid to get down from the top of the mountain, because, down the hill, beloveds, God awaits for us to fall in love, and then, get up.

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Beloveds, I want to introduce you to someone very dear to me. This is Lola. Lola asks the questions I sometimes don't dare to ask out loud. She listens carefully, she is a little curious, and she cares very much about loving people well on Monday morning. So today, she will help us pray.

Voice I (Diego): Holy One, on the mountain you called Jesus Beloved and told us to listen. We may never see him shining like the sun, but we can love like him on Monday morning.

Voice II (Lola): God... sometimes I just want to stay where it feels good. But you say, "Get up. Do not be afraid." Help me go down the mountain and love people for real.

Voice I: Teach us that salvation is not a debate, but belovedness lived together.

Voice II: Make us brave enough to fall in love with the world — so everyone can say, "It is good to be here."

Together: Amen.

BLESSING

May you rise from every mountain where you felt loved.

May you not be afraid to say, with your whole life, *I am in love* — in love with goodness, with mercy, with justice, with the One who calls you Beloved.

On this day when the world speaks of romance, may you remember this tenderness: that you are already loved, and that you are capable of loving in return.

May your love not remain a feeling but become a touch, a word, a table set wider than before.

May your salvation not be a theory, but a life shared after being at the mountain.

And may it be said — with and by people of color, by the persecuted, by the imprisoned — we share a world where *It is good for us to be here*.

May your love help make this sentence true, and as we get up. Do not be afraid during and after coffee hour.

Amen.