

## ***Bedazzled***

A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC  
March 3, 2019 – 8th Sunday after Epiphany  
Text: Luke 9:28-36

I am not a crafty person. This is not new information to many of the folks here in the congregation. Lynn Murray has tried to teach me to knit. No dice. Claire Calabretta has tried to teach me to sew. I can now cut material out following a pattern fairly well. Putting it together in some fashion so that it resembles whatever it is we were trying to make – not so much. Thanks to Sandi Davis, I now can find the bias of the material and, I finally understand the bias of material has nothing to do with its views on particular social issues! Rosemary Jette has assured me I can crochet. Honestly, I am not brave enough to try.

I've always been up front about my fabric impairment. I've never tried to hide it. I'm quite honest about the fact that I barely passed Home Ec. in Junior High because I sewed the hem of the dress I had to make to my pants. I'm not kidding. The teacher only gave me a "B" because she said I had the best "ripping out" skills she had ever seen. All of this goes to explain why, when I first saw a "Bedazzler" on late night television while I was in high school I was thrilled. At last, I thought, something to do with fabric that I could probably actually do!!! I started dreaming of all the things I could bedazzle – my favorite jeans, my over the

shoulder cloth hippy purse, even that pair of bland white Keds my mother made my buy. Those white Keds would be bland no more!!! Yes, it was quite exciting ... until I asked my mom about ordering a Bedazzler and her answer was not what I hoped for. It was an unambiguous “NO!” Not only did she find the whole notion of ordering something off the television to be downright frightening (you’ll send in your money, never see it again, and they’ll have your address!), she was horrified by the concept of studding anything with fake rhinestones in a myriad of colors. “Real ladies do not bedazzle,” she said to me in that emphatic voice that told me the matter was permanently closed for discussion. And so my dreams of bedazzling my clothes and my life evaporated in a cloud of maternal disapproval on multiple levels.

Now that you have heard my bedazzler tale of woe I should ask, do you all know what a bedazzler is? (pause) Can anyone explain to the others what it does? (pause) Okay, now here’s the real question – who here has used a bedazzler? (pause) On what, may we ask (pause for responses)? Now, really, don’t they sound like fun? Although I do confess, I can’t imagine that wearing skinny jeans with the legs totally bedazzled could be very comfortable – all those studs up against your skin!!

So, you’ve got to be wondering by now what a bedazzler has to do with the sermon text we read this morning. That’s an

excellent question! The connection can be found in the fact that, in our tradition, this is Transfiguration Sunday and Transfiguration Sunday is a time when the disciples were quite literally bedazzled – not by rhinestone studs on their clothing but instead when they witnessed firsthand a miraculous occurrence in Jesus’ life. The event they witnessed was a unique mystical experience Jesus had on a mountaintop where he had gone to pray, bringing three disciples – Peter, James and John – with him. As Jesus was praying, Peter, John and James noticed that he was actually starting to glow, his clothing was becoming dazzling white. He was literally shining, radiating the glory of God. As he continued praying in this glowing state, he was joined by two of the greatest men of the Hebrew Scriptures: Moses, the lawgiver and Elijah, the great prophet. Wanting to do something to preserve the moment, Peter went up to Jesus and offered to make booths or little huts for each of them but before anything like that could happen, a cloud descended and a voice called out, “this is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” Then the cloud left and Jesus was alone, presumably no longer glowing but changed somehow nonetheless. The text says the disciples “kept silent” and told no one what had happened. No wonder!

So, what we have here is a story of how Jesus literally “bedazzled” the disciples who witnessed this extraordinary event. They saw Jesus start to glow, from the radiance of God’s glory and

then he was joined by two of the most powerful religious leaders of their tradition. What was going on here? Interestingly, there is no clear agreement among scholars as to what this strange event means or why it happened. That it was a powerful mystical experience – so powerful that Jesus’ physical appearance was itself changed or transfigured, if only briefly – is beyond question. For this reason, it is considered to be one of Jesus’ miracles, the only one that happened *to* Jesus during his life instead of being performed *by* Jesus. But what was its intent? Why did it happen? It would seem that part of its purpose was to emphasize that Jesus really was God’s chosen one. He really was the long-awaited Messiah. The booming voice from the cloud makes that clear. Other scholars suggest that in this event we see Jesus functioning as a pivot point, a direct connection between the earthly and the divine realms, between Jesus’ humanity and God’s divinity. What is beyond doubt is that the gospel writers intended it to signify an extraordinary moment in Jesus’ life which most likely occurred within months of the end of his earthly ministry. This event revealed to the three disciples who witnessed it, three disciples Jesus intentionally brought with him, that Jesus had been sent by God and was someone unlike anyone who had come before him or anyone who would come after him. Jesus was God’s chosen. After this extraordinary moment, there could be no doubt.

This story is an important one for us to ponder together, I think. For one thing, in addition to the obvious positive ramifications of this story as it affirmed for the disciples that Jesus was God's Chosen, we need also to consider what it teaches us about ourselves and how easily dazzled we are by those who are more "shiny," more affluent, more famous, more anything than we are. Simply put, we need to pause and examine how easily we can be dazzled by someone who may not be worthy of either our respect or our admiration. We are so easily dazzled by someone's beautiful clothes, by their wealth and success – or at least what we believe their wealth and success to be. We're dazzled by celebrity, whether movie actors or athletes or whomever. We're dazzled by business tycoons and super models. Let's face it, we're easily dazzled by folks who seem extraordinary when we compare them to our simple, ordinary selves. We seem so boring and uninteresting and they seem so --- special. Right? But, are they really? Why do we do that to ourselves, assume that the other person who seems so dazzling is better than we are? It's amazing how quick we are to concede our own self-worth to people we don't even know. Why is that, do you suppose? Human nature, I think. "The grass is always greener," as the old adage goes.

The real problem with being so easily dazzled by others whom we assume are somehow better than us is that this is the exact opposite of what Jesus would want us to do. Jesus was all

about looking beyond the surface of people to see who they really were. He didn't hang out with the "right" people in town, the dazzling people with beautiful clothes and comfortable houses, the Temple leaders or the learned elite. In fact, they got annoyed with him because he didn't think much of them! Instead, he hung out with the poor people, the sick people, the people who couldn't even afford to pray in the Temple. Jesus wasn't dazzled by things or impressed by the people who had everything. Jesus was instead drawn to the people who had nothing, because they needed him the most. They also were the first to believe that he was who he was, the Son of God who loved them just as they were.

Dear friends, Jesus became dazzling on that mountain top because of his connection to God, not because of his connection to wealth and power and success as the world measures those things. Jesus was not dazzling in the conventional sense at all. Instead Jesus became dazzlingly, brilliantly, gloriously radiant on that mountaintop because he was open to a life-changing, life-altering, life-upending encounter with God. He changed in that moment because God changed him, and the change in him caused changes in everyone who knew him. In this extraordinary mountaintop moment, Jesus became who God needed him to be. He received from God exactly what he needed to face the final stages of his earthly ministry – confidence and strength that he was up to doing whatever God needed him to do.

And guess what? Each of us, you and me, has that same opportunity to get what we need from God to do what God needs us to do. Each of us can turn to God any time in prayer, baring our lives and our souls to God, asking God to show us the way forward when we can't see it for ourselves. Each of us can find solace, rest and comfort in God when we are too tired, too hurting to go on. We just have to believe God cares about us enough to be there for us, simple, insignificant us. We have to pause long enough for God to touch us, allow enough silence in our lives so that we can hear God reaching out to us. Simply put, we have to make space for God in our lives so that God can be present to us as God wants so much to be. Now, does this mean that if we stop and pray that God will miraculously answer all our prayer requests and make all our problems go away? Will we suddenly become dazzlingly shiny as God makes a spectacular connection with us? No. God doesn't work like that. God is not a fairy godmother. Instead God invites you to make room in your life for God to come in and it is that act of making room, making space, making time for God that allows your life to change, little by little, bit by bit. It doesn't happen all at once in some glittering explosion of light. We won't suddenly glow in the dark because we've discovered what it means to connect with God. But we will learn, we will experience what it is to be changed by God from the

inside out because that's how prayer works, that's how faith lived in the midst of our doubts and failures, works.

Will you ever have a mountaintop experience like Jesus did? So profound that you will literally start to glow? I doubt it but then, who knows? Stranger things have happened. But, can you be a person who glows with the love of Jesus every day right now? Yes, absolutely! And wouldn't that just bedazzle everyone who met you? Yes. Yes, it would. Imagine that... Amen.