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Transfiguration: A Gift to Be Shared

When I was in seminary I had the unique opportunity to witness the Tibetan Buddhist ritual of both creating and destroying a sand mandala. For one week and dozens of hours monks sat on the floor gently rubbing the grooves of long thin funnels, gently dispensing individual grains of vibrantly colored sand as they created a complex and intricately patterned design on the floor. All while chanting in prayer together. As their ritual was not only a meditative practice, enacted for their own benefit, guiding them along in their journey towards enlightenment, but also a blessing offered on behalf of a hurting world, as they prayed for healing and wholeness. The most fascinating aspect of this whole process, to me, was the final product. Not simply in it's immense beauty (although it was one of the most beautiful and impressive works of art I had ever witnessed, with vividly bright colors, detailed images of flowers and dancing buddhas intermingled with exquisitely beautiful geometric designs, all moving around a never ending circle), but also in the fact that after the mandala was completed, and viewers had a moment to experience it's call to meditation, it was immediately destroyed, in a ceremony as sacred and significant and sacred as its creation.

As I watched the monks over the course of that week tirelessly bowed down as they created this perfectly precise and immensely beautiful piece of art it was almost painful, knowing it would soon all be destroyed. Swept away like the sand my toddlers track all over the kitchen floor. But, to the monks this was the most significant part of the whole ritual. Because it not only demonstrated their core belief, in accepting the impermanence and non-attachment of our ever changing universe. But also because it invited and enabled us, viewers and participants alike, to truly live it out. As we all we're able to take part in the meditation of the mandalas creation, contemplating the idea that beauty is best received in the present moment. Realizing the gift of non-attachment as an invitation to wholeness. And allowing its impermanence to come to fruition right before our eyes.

In our reading from Mark today we hear the story of Jesus' transfiguration. As Peter, James, and John march up that high mount with Jesus only to find themselves in the midst of the most awe inspiring and utterly terrifying experience of their lives. As Jesus becomes more dazzling white than fresh fallen snow at dawn, and then is inadvertently joined by Elijah, the prophet who was carried into heaven on a chariot, and Moses, who died in the desert never to enter the promised land he now stands on. And in the midst of all the beauty that is this moment, and the improbability that is this occurrence, Peter blurts out, without even knowing what he is saying, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Because this moment in time is miraculous, this very occurrence in space is astounding, and these people present to witness are forevermore connected. It is all so amazing and so wonderful that of course Peter wants to preserve it forever, and stay here for always. I mean this is the height of Jesus' ministry, he is healing the diseased and casting out demons from the tormented, he is feeding the masses and dining with the outcasts, he is teaching about good news as he blesses the poor in spirit, the hungry, and those who mourn. And, at the same time he is beginning to foretell the fact that the Son of Man soon must be killed by betrayal and die by way of crucifixion. With all this in mind it is no wonder Peter wants to preserve this second of

glory, to stay in this place of beauty, and to keep these people safe from any harm, or trouble, or change.

After the monks had finished their week's work, the mandala was completed. And, we were all invited to witness the destruction of this beautifully complex prayer that had taken on the form of a vibrantly colored and intricately laid out design. As the monks began the destruction ceremony, they did so with the same tenderness and care they had previously used in its creation. Meticulously sweeping the sand around and gathering it up to be dispensed and disbursed of. Some of the sand they gave to witnesses, that we might share it as a blessing with others. And the rest they threw into the river, in hopes that the blessing of their work, and time, and prayer might be received not only by themselves, or those who witnessed it, but by the whole world. Reminding us that what we do, and witness, and even put out into the world it matters. And more so, that our ability to let it all go, to cease to cling, and begin to share can become our gift and even a balm to those around us.

As Peter blurts out his response to the miraculous event of the transfiguration taking place right before his eyes God, without missing a beat, almost immediately, jumps in to say "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Almost as if he knew his son, Jesus, might say something he could regret, and so saves him in the moment. Either way, no sooner does Peter desire to cling to the moment, and in so doing begin to forget the mission, does it all come to its fruition. As God reminds Peter, and us all, of the whole purpose of Jesus' time on earth, "This is my Son the beloved, listen to him."

On Wednesday we will enter our Season of Lent, which is a time for (as our book of common prayer invites us to) self-examination and repentance... prayer, fasting, and self-denial... and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. What would it mean for us, like those monks, to take this time on as both a necessary spiritual practice for our own journey towards wholeness, and for the betterment and beneficiary of our hurting world. A time where we lean into the impermanence of this life, both in it's beauty and it's pain, in it's glory and it's monotony, in it's joy and it's suffering. Or even like the Peter, James, and John as a time to be with Jesus, so that we might witness something of the miraculous, of God's glory, of what is to come and what is already here right in front of us. Not to simply cloister ourselves away, but so that we might take those moments of glory and revelation and share them with the world. How much more might it strengthen us in our journey? How much more might we be able to fully share in and live out the good news? Like the monks making our life's work our prayer and our time a gift to be shared. So that we too might take our own moments of glory out into the world to share with those who need, to spread around like the sand my toddlers sprinkle throughout my home, haphazardly giving away the glory of God, the love Christ, and the power of the Spirit wherever we go.