



LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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A Different Kind of Light

Matthew 17: 1-9

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***1 - Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I[a] will make three dwellings[b] here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved;[c] with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.***

***9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."***

Its Transfiguration Sunday, we find a very familiar yet still quite mysterious text describing Jesus' mountain top experience with Peter James and John, where his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. He has already told his followers that they are the light of the world, but this is something else, this is a glimpse for those 3 disciples of who Jesus is, this is a different kind of light.

In scripture we quite often find God using the mountain top for momentous moments. The story of the transfiguration as found in Matthew reminiscent of the Moses met God on Mt Sinai, where God met with Moses on the mountain, covered in clouds, and Moses comes down his face glowing from the encounter with God's presence. It is this moment that signifies God is renewing God's covenant and purposes. It associates Jesus with the great figures of God's revelation and movement in the past, with the expectations for God's messiah and fulfillment of God's covenant in the future. The transfiguration connects Jesus with the Moses' covenant, and hints at the new covenant to come.

Anyone who has summited a mountain or even a really big hill and looked in all directions knows there is a special experience associated with it. Mountains grant a particular perspective and view. I have spoken before of the hills that are close to my hometown, and though they are not mountains, (they might be in Florida,) they still give a wonderful reward for an hour or so of steep climbing. The view of my town from the top is different from street level, a different perspective indeed. We used to climb one of them early on Easter morning to experience the sunrise followed by a worship service led by local ministers. It was a beautiful thing.

The term mountain top experience has become part of our vernacular to describe those wonderful moments in our life, that are hard to explain but you know everything is good, including those moments when we seem to feel particularly close to God, when we are granted a glimpse of something special, a glimpse of glory. As a young believer, I remember hearing that phrase at big worship events our group went to, but I also think of those intimate moments when I have the presence of God that come around every now and then as mountain top moments. A little glimpse of glory.

Our students, who traveled to the Alpha conference last year experienced that glimpse of glory at the conference and maybe especially in worship. When we came back and planned for our Alpha conference, we discussed, what we'd like to happen, we prayed for God be present, and God answered the prayers. I met with our students after week 1 and there was this excitement, none of us could explain, God had shown up and we knew it. The Holy Spirit was at work. God gave us a glimpse of glory.

We have our own ideas of God's presence, intellectually we can accept that God is omni-present, or that God lives within and is evident in creation, but it seems every now and then with no rhyme or reason, God just walks through the room, and you know it. It's a mystery, a gift but I am sure if we opened the floor many of you could share a similar moment. A moment when it seemed God was right there, when the distance between heaven and earth seemed closer.

Transfiguration is a fancy Church word for a change in appearance, a transformation. The same Greek word is used by Paul later in scripture to describe a more internal change, but it seems pretty clear this is visible. Jesus is transformed. He is in the light, he is light, dazzling white. He is talking with Elijah and Moses. We have the defining declaration of just who Jesus is in Matthew's gospel as they are overshadowed by the cloud, and the voice declares that Jesus is God's son. This is a big moment in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew reveals who Jesus is, and from here on, just like our church calendar, Matthew is on a journey to Easter and the cross. One small detail that Matthew includes that the other Gospels do not is his opening phrase, *Six days later*. Matthew is linking this event to the events at the end of the previous chapter where Peter has declared Jesus to be the Messiah and Jesus has predicted his suffering, death and resurrection.

In her article for this Sunday in the Presbyterian Outlook, Rev, Anna Owens states that, *Transfiguration Sunday marks a threshold moment — the bright culmination of Advent’s hope, Christmas’s joy and Epiphany’s guiding light — and the turning point where Jesus’ journey, and ours, begins to bend unmistakably toward the cross. We stand at the close of one season and orient ourselves toward the Lenten wilderness ahead.*

So unlike Moses’ experience, the transfiguration is framed by the cross.

There are 3 disciples there and it is Peter that captures my attention. He cannot let this moment go. While the transfigured Jesus is in conversation with Moses and Elijah, Peter, probably very emotional breaks in. Think about that for a minute, Jesus, Moses and Elijah are speaking, and Peter thinks he can join in. I love how Peterson’s The Message has this conversation, *Peter broke in, “Master, this is a great moment! What would you think if I built three memorials here on the mountain—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah?”*

<sup>5</sup> *While he was going on like this, babbling, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and sounding from deep in the cloud a voice: “This is my Son, marked by my love, focus of my delight. Listen to him.”*

This moment is a gift to these guys, their glimpse of glory. Peter wants to hold onto this moment; he wants to memorialize it. He wants to stay on the mountain top, yet when they hear the voice of God, along with James and John, he is scared and falls to the ground. Jesus comes to them and tells them not to be afraid. He tells them this a few times in scripture, he wants them to know he is with them, so no need for fear.

Now we don’t know what Peter was able to build at the time, but The Traditional spot for The Transfiguration on Mt Tabor has a pretty fancy

temple on it to this Day.

Rev. Owens writes, *at some point, we all have to come back down the mountain. At some point, we must all journey to the wilderness. But we do not go alone. May Jesus' words echo in our hearts and minds as we go, boldly, bravely, and unafraid*

So it is for the disciples, the moment is over and they are heading down the mountain where Jesus tells them not to talk about it for a while. But I bet Peter and the other 2 remembered this event and took hope from it and drew strength from it for a long time. I mean how could you forget.

Those mountain-top moments in our life are things we remember, things we speak of when things got rough, moments of strength when life was not, we wanted it to be. It's like we need these gifts of God, these glimpses of glory. They provide comfort for the journey.

So I want to be like Peter. Let's hold onto those moments, it is so easy for us as we grow older to also grow cold to the mystery of God, to forget the joy perhaps once experienced in our journey, so easy to go through the motions. I encourage you to hold the mystery close and as a something precious. Those moments should be treasured, remembered, be told in stories and used as fuel for the journey. Because we live in a world and in times when we can get weary and tired and lose some of that childlike faith that Jesus says is so important. But we also live in a world when God may walk through the room at any moment and give us a glimpse of glory.

It has been said, in the past that I see God in situations that are nothing to do with God, Maybe I look too hard, imagine things, and that could be fair. But I would suggest that we don't look hard enough for the things of God all

around us. These glimpses of glory or glimpses of The Kingdom of God are all around us. It may not be the drama of this scene, but look closely.

Through music that touches us deeply, perhaps through the word of another, They may come through your thin place, those places you love to go where it just feels like the space between heaven and earth is not so distant.

In many ways that is why we come here isn't it. That is why we want to be with each other. We yearn for the touch, the presence of God, the glimpse of glory. But we don't always look for it.

So, though these moments don't roll around every day, and God knows I have tried to manufacture them many times in youth groups or mission trips without success, if we look close enough, we will see the Holy, we will see the glimpses of glory that surround us.

So, treasure those moments as gifts from God, not proof of God, but as gifts for the journey, and remember wherever you are on the journey, the one thing that is constant, the one thing we know if we are in the wilderness or on the mountain top is that we are not alone. Jesus is present, Jesus is with us. May his love, his grace and his reassurance that he is with you be a reality this morning. Amen.