

#15 10-11

MOUNTAINTOPS

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalms 99

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9As 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."

Mountaintops: Moses went up one to get the Ten Commandments, and came down glowing; Elijah ran away to hide in one and faced fire and storms and found God in the still small voice; and who could forget Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous Mountaintop speech, where the night before he died he said, "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!"

Mountaintops - Jesus gave his famous sermon on the mount - and now we have another account of Jesus and three of his followers went up a mountaintop and met God. Moses and Elijah were alone in their revelation - but Jesus had 3 friends with him and they all shared the experience - and we today can be with him everyday on that mountaintop, we are called each day to believe the glory of that moment and trust that we share in the transfiguration of our lives.

Transfiguration - what does it mean? Well, by now you all know my love of sharing dictionary definitions - so here goes. According to the online source, Harry Potter Wiki it is, "Transfiguration is the art of changing the form and appearance of an object and the vanishing of objects. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry devotes an entire section of their curriculum to Transfiguration."

Waitaminute - maybe that wasn't the right source . . . just a second . . . OK - how about this one from Wikipedia: "Transfiguration, in religion, refers to the assumption by spiritual masters, or its perception by their followers, of momentary divine radiance. Transfigure as a verb is defined as 1. to change in outward form or appearance; transform.

2. to change so as to glorify or exalt."

So for our purposes this has nothing really to do with turning a bird into a water goblet, and has everything to do with glorifying God. For one brief moment in time some followers of Jesus were allowed to witness what they suspected all along - that this man, Jesus, was on the same plain spiritually as the greatest known spiritual leaders in the history of their faith! This carpenter's son was glowing, and these 2 other figures were there. How Peter, James and John knew who these other two men were, it doesn't say, but they knew that the man they had been in awe of and willing to give up their lives to follow was in conversation with Moses and Elijah. And just to make sure that the followers were clear on whom Jesus was, God spoke from a bright cloud, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

One online source shared that "this miracle is unique among others that appear in the Canonical gospels, in that the miracle happens to Jesus *himself*. Thomas Aquinas considered the Transfiguration 'the greatest miracle' in that it complemented baptism and showed the perfection of life in Heaven." (Wikipedia) "Jesus describes the transfiguration using the Greek word *oroma* (Matthew 17:9), according to Thayer more often used for a supernatural "vision" than for real physical events, and concluded that Moses and Elijah were not truly there. Maximus the Confessor said that the senses of the apostles were likewise transfigured to enable them to perceive the true glory of Christ."

So we have this amazing glorious experience - which was too much for Peter, James and John to deal with. The voice of God and the experience of their sense being transfigured terrified them so much they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.

I do believe that everyone has had at least one moment in their lives when they felt overpowered by fear. And we may not even have been aware of what we were afraid of! Most times we know quite clearly what is scaring us, but sometimes there is just an overwhelming oddness; a moment in time when we don't know if we can trust our perceptions, senses or emotions. And what did Christ do for the three? "Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Touch: the healing power the stabilizing the return to a sense of balance; touch can be so miraculous. The followers were transformed themselves through the experience they shared. They were shaken up, brought back to balance and left that mountaintop transformed, because they had the experience of seeing this man they had put their hopes into transfigure into the son of God, they witnessed the power of that moment - they were struck down and lifted up - and they knew they could trust their intuition as never before. Before this trip, they had a pretty good idea that this Jesus was worthy - but now they knew that he was not only on par with the greatest heroes of their faith, but far greater even!

But they couldn't get away so easily - "9As 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.'" They were reinforced in their perceptions, and yet weren't allowed to tell anyone what they saw.

We can imagine a variety of reasons why this messianic secret was so important to the development of the faith. Perhaps if word got out about this before the final proof of Jesus' godliness, the resurrection, it would have only confused and complicated the faith for others. How much more difficult would it have been for Jesus to be amongst the people and heal and live and love if word got out that there is this guy for whom it is claimed that he is greater than the two most revered figures in their religious history?

So we have a mountaintop experience full of glory and reveling more truth than most mere mortals could stand, and they are brought back to balance through the compassionate touch of Jesus and a sobering walk back down the mountain.

We are asked on this day to imagine ourselves as being on that mountain with them as well. For we all share in this experience - every time we pray, every time we pause to reflect and change our patterns of living to match Christ's - every time we share in the body and blood of Christ - we share in this transfiguration.

Except now we are post Easter people - we don't have to keep it a secret. In fact, we are encouraged to share our personal transforming experiences of faith with others.

Interestingly enough, according to Patrick J. Willson when *Luke* tells this bit of the story he highlights prayer. "When Luke preaches the received tradition, he tells it as a story about what happened when Jesus 'went up to the mountain to pray. And while he was praying', the transfiguration occurs . . . and when he preaches the transfiguration, Luke explains: 'Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.' Luke 9:32 In Luke's sermon, the transfiguration's glory is perceptible only to those who know how to pray."

But in Matthew's version - it is what it is - they can share in the experience because they believe. They can witness God's truth and be touched by Jesus and their fears removed. All these things hold true for us as well. We can be transfigured with Christ by following him, by being touched by him, and by telling those we know of our transformations.