

Luke 9:28-36

9:28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.9:29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.9:30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.9:31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.9:32 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.9:33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" -- not knowing what he said.9:34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.9:35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"9:36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Glimpses of Glory 2/27/22

What comes to mind when you think of a mountaintop moment in your life?

Think of a time God overwhelmed you with a display of God's power or presence or love. Do you remember? Can you feel how you felt? Did your heart pound? Did a chill go down your spine? As you know, I grew up in the East, but I always wanted to see the West, ever since I was a young girl. I got my chance when Guy and I were young. We had been married for a year. We had a short vacation, so we drove nonstop day and night and into the next day until we got to Colorado. I remember Guy saying, "well, there they are!" I looked up and *there stood the Rocky Mountains* in the distance. I was astounded to see them just rising out of the plains. That was a mountaintop moment for me. I gazed at the Rockies in awe. The mountains were so majestic. Such a magnificent reflection of the beauty and majesty of our God--our God who created them. That morning many years ago, I caught a glimpse of God's glory.

This morning we are looking at the original mountaintop moment. It is a holy, mysterious event in Jesus's life where we also can catch a glimpse of God's

glory. It is a scene that we cannot fully fathom this side of heaven. It is ok not to solve every spiritual mystery. Sometimes it is good just to drink in the beauty and awe of a holy moment. To catch a glimpse of the glory of God as we gaze on the wonder that is the Transfiguration.

In our scripture from Luke, Jesus takes 3 of the apostles with him when he hikes up the mountain to pray. Peter, James, and John get to go with Jesus for a special prayer time apart. They have no idea what they are about to witness. Picture the scene with me—Jesus is standing on the mountaintop in his ordinary clothes, likely lifting his arms and face heavenward as he prays. Perhaps Peter, James, and John are kneeling in prayer nearby, joining their hearts with Jesus's as Jesus prays. I picture them also lifting up their hands in prayer, looking up to heaven. Standing or kneeling with open hands to receive God's blessings was a common position for prayer among the Jews. As Jesus prays, the appearance of his face also inexplicably changes. Some translations say Jesus's face was altered, or became different. How his face is different, how it is altered, we do not precisely know. We heard in our OT reading that Moses's face changed so that his skin shone when he came down from Mount Sinai after being in God's presence. Whatever the way was that it shone, it was something that frightened God's people. Moses's shining face must have had a unique appearance that is not easily described. A shining face does not sound very scary. I think there were just no

words to adequately tell how Moses's face looked, and it is the same with Jesus here. But Peter, James, and John all see it. And they see Jesus's ordinary clothes turn to dazzling white. Matthew's gospel describes this same scene in this way: *he [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.* Maybe we picture Jesus here looking like characters in movies we have seen, perhaps when Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* is surrounded in light and his clothes are flashing white. I don't think our finite imaginations can truly picture what Peter, James and John saw that day when Jesus was transfigured. They were seeing a glimpse of Jesus in his heavenly glory, Jesus as he truly is—both God and man. Scripture tells us in Colossians 1:15 that Jesus is *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* And as if that is not enough, the next thing that happens is that Moses and Elijah show up! How do Peter, James, and John know who the men are? We are not told how. Perhaps they glean it from the conversation Moses and Elijah have with Jesus. Maybe Moses and Elijah introduce themselves to the wonderstruck apostles! We can use our imaginations but need to continue to be content with mystery in this story.

Moses and Elijah appear in glory, God's Word tells us here in Luke. They surely don't look like ordinary men, either. And then we learn why Moses and Elijah have come to meet Jesus on the mountaintop. They speak to Jesus *of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* Some translators use

the word “exodus” instead of “departure,” since the Greek here translates into English as “exodus.” Moses knows something about an exodus! We remember the trials surrounding the Exodus. Plagues of frogs and flies and boils and blood come to mind. And of the death of the first-born of the animals and the people alike, all the way up to Pharaoh. An exodus has a heavy cost. It is a cost Jesus is willing to pay as he prepares to head to Jerusalem. But notice. God sends Moses and Elijah to help Jesus get ready for what Jesus is about to face. Who do we count on to help us through the trials and changes of life? Do you notice that God sends help to Jesus in answer to Jesus’s prayers? I suggest when we need help—direction or guidance or care or physical help—our best first step is prayer. God knows who we need to come alongside us. Usually our wise God sends Christians who will pray with us and for us. And good people who will give us practical help.

Do you remember who God has sent to get you ready for an exodus you have taken? Think of what it means to Jesus to pray and the answer to his prayer turns out to be face-to-face counsel with Moses, who led God’s people out of slavery, and with Elijah, the greatest prophet of the OT? And to also have his 3 closest friends on earth with him for the whole experience? God means for us to have companions with us on our journey through life. Way back in Genesis God said it is not good for man to be alone. That is one reason it is so important to worship together regularly as Jesus followers. We draw strength from both God

and one another, as Jesus did on the Mount of Transfiguration. Not that every worship service is a mountaintop experience. But every service is soul strengthening if we are open to it being so. I think it is a good idea to latch onto one thing that impacts us in some way in every service and carry that in our hearts throughout our week. It could be a truth from a hymn or something God brings to your mind during a prayer. Maybe it's God's love shown through the greeting of one of your sisters or brothers. Or an application for your life from the message or the scripture reading. God is here, and I truly believe God has something for each of us, every time we meet. Psalm 122:1 says *I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."* If we come to worship with an attitude of joy and the expectation of experiencing God, we will go away both blessed and strengthened for service. And we might even get a glimpse of God's glory while we are here!

I think a puzzling element during the Transfiguration meeting is the fact that Peter, James, and John are *weighed down with sleep*, we read in v. 32. Wouldn't you think they would be wide awake? What could be more exciting than being in the presence of transfigured Jesus and of Moses and Elijah, visiting from heaven? Then I thought of how sleepy I can get on a warm, sunny afternoon. All that sunshine can sort of drug me into wanting to take a nap. I wonder if the glory and light of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah is kind of like that. Whatever the literal meaning

of this part is, we can certainly make a practical application. That is, if we want to catch glimpses of glory, we have got to stay awake when they are likely to occur! I am reminded of a time many years ago when our friends who lived next door invited us to come watch the Pleiades meteor shower with them. Our whole family got up at 3 in the morning and went next door to stretch out on our friends' deck, eat warm chocolate chip cookies, and watch all the falling stars. It was a glimpse of glory we would have missed if we had stayed asleep. A good prayer for all of us is, "Lord, keep me awake to You." I believe that is a prayer our Lord delights to answer in the affirmative.

One commentator I read suggests that we can miss out on God's best for us because our *minds* are asleep. He writes: "There are certain things which are liable to keep our minds asleep...prejudice, mental lethargy, love of ease. But life is full of things designed to waken us...sorrow, love, and a sense of need."

Peter's mind may have been asleep when he sees that Moses and Elijah are about to take their leave. Hear what he says: "*Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah*" -- *not knowing what he said*. Impulsive Peter doesn't really think through what he is saying. I think in a situation like that I might start babbling too. Peter does not want Moses and Elijah to go. He wants to hang onto the mountaintop moment, so he talks nonsense about building homes for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah right there.

Peter gets stopped in his tracks right away, though, as we hear in v. 34-35: *While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"*

If Peter, James and John were overwhelmed by seeing God's glory reflected in Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, they are understandably terrified upon hearing the voice of Almighty God coming from the cloud that overshadows them! God often employs a cloud to communicate with us humans. You'll recall that God led the children of Israel through the wilderness by going before them in a pillar of cloud. And we hear in I Kings 8:10-11 about how breathtaking it is to encounter the glory of God in the cloud: *when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.* There are many other similar scriptures. We can be sure Peter and his companions are not sleepy now! They are on full terror alert. They hear God's message loud and clear: *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"* With this message, we realize that the mystery of the Transfiguration has a twofold purpose. To get Jesus ready for the difficult road before him, as the events unfold that lead up to the cross. And to get his disciples ready too. It is crucial that they know without a doubt right now that Jesus is the chosen Son of God. There are trials and doubts ahead for all of Jesus's followers.

They need this clear message from God in this mountaintop experience to equip them for the agony that awaits them as well as Jesus.

The message is “listen to Jesus.” That message is for us as disciples of Jesus in 2022, as well. Peter, James, and John had the mountaintop message from God and saw more than one glimpse of God’s glory. But the other 9 apostles weren’t on the mountaintop. We don’t know how long it was before they heard the testimony of Peter, James, and John, but it wasn’t right away. Our final verse in our gospel reading today tells us that *they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen*. Like Jesus’s 9 apostles who missed the mountaintop message from God personally and needed to receive it later through the testimony of others, we too are disciples who learn of the Transfiguration through others, the authors of the gospels. We already have something the apostles and Jesus’s other disciples did not have until Pentecost, however, and that is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. All too often, in our human weakness we forget to tap into that power. As we head into the season of Lent this Wednesday, we can discover for ourselves that now is an opportune time to realign ourselves with Holy Spirit power as we listen for Jesus’s voice. One of the best ways to hear Jesus’s voice is when we are in prayer. Think how Jesus was transformed in this passage when he prayed! If Jesus was changed by prayer, we surely can be too. We may catch glimpses of God’s glory as we humble ourselves on Ash Wednesday by remembering our mortality

and confessing our sin. As we realize how dependent we are on Jesus our Savior. Throughout Lent, we can take the opportunity to listen to Jesus through deeper spiritual disciplines. Our United Methodist tradition encourages us with these words in our Book of Worship: The Lenten invitation to “observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s Holy Word.” How will you plan now for your Lenten practice? It will look a little different for each of us, because what we need to do to go deeper with Jesus is unique to each person. However you decide to observe Lent this year, know that we are given a special opportunity to catch fresh glimpses of God’s glory as we listen to Jesus and seek his face throughout the solemn days of Lent. Amen.