

Transfiguration of Our Lord (RCL/A): “Sharing Mountain-Top Stories with Those in Base Camp”

Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9

February 22-23, 2020

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

While some people are having mountaintop experience, others -- aren't. Here are parts of the story we **didn't** hear today. We heard in the Gospel how Peter, James & John were eyewitnesses to Jesus being transfigured on the mount. Meanwhile the other 9 apostles were at the bottom of the mountain, passengers on the struggle bus. The father of a child who was apparently epileptic begged them to heal his son. They were powerless to help. 'Probably no coincidence that they'd just heard the jarring news from Jesus that He was getting ready to suffer and die. Jesus had also predicted He'd be raised again on the third day, but His friends were so freaked out by the **bad** news of His passion and death that they were deaf to the **good** news of His resurrection. Their faith was shaken to the point that, in the moment, they were spiritually paralyzed and couldn't serve as human channels of God's healing grace. Glory on the mountain and despair down below.

In the first lesson from Exodus Moses ascends the mountain. All the people know is that he's climbed so high he's disappeared into the clouds and been lost to their sight. When they look up all they see is “a devouring fire on the top of the mountain” (Exodus 24:17), which may have seemed like an incredible lightning storm or even the eruption of a volcano! Moses is gone for forty days and forty nights. He hadn't told them how long he expected to be gone, so they didn't know if he was **ever** going to return. They got nervous, they got rowdy, they got distracted, and they busied themselves melting down their jewelry

and creating a golden calf to worship, like their masters back in Egypt. Glory on the mountain and idolatry down below.

On those mountaintops Peter, James & John, **and** Moses, experienced the **intimate, immediate** presence of God. In the story from Exodus, others did, too, before Moses scaled the mountain alone. Just before the passage we heard today, there's a wonderful description of the pre-trip luncheon at which Moses is joined by three priests and seventy prophets. One Bible scholar "describes these verses as 'some of the most astonishing and inexplicable verses in the Old Testament.'"¹

¹⁰... and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹God did not lay a hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank. (Exodus 24:10-11)

The word on the street was that a human being who looked upon God would die. Not so here. This was a great exception-to-the-rule. Moses, these priests and prophets, were in God's presence as they ate and drank. [Pointing to altar:] What a concept!! They had **communion** with God. **We** have communion with God.

Not everyone knows it's possible: to **really be in God's presence**, as surely as Peter, James & John, Moses, those priests and prophets were. We believe in our Lord's Real Presence **on the altar**, in the blessed Bread & Wine of this Eucharist. We believe in Jesus' real presence **here, anywhere**, where 2 or more of us gather in His name. We believe in God's presence in the last, the lost and the lost, whom He calls "members of my family" (Matthew 25:40): the hungry, the lonely, the mentally ill, the addicted, the homeless, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the incarcerated, the ex-felon, the undocumented. For those with eyes to see, "the glory of the Lord" settled not only on Mt. Sinai, not only on the Mount of Transfiguration, but on a Child laid in a manger in Bethlehem, on a man rising up

dripping after baptism in the River Jordan, on the same man riding a donkey into Jerusalem and a short time later hanging from a cross on Calvary. And the glory of the Lord shines on us in our everyday lives and not just during worship in this sanctuary.

We all have a story to tell and a witness to make to the real presence of God in our lives. For a year now we've been inviting folks to contribute faith stories to the book we plan to publish for Holy Trinity's 100th birthday in 2022. Truth be told, we have not been buried under an avalanche of submissions. I'm guessing there are a few reasons besides for people simply leading busy lives. One is: I think some people may have a hard time identifying God-incidences in their lives. Kinda like the confirmands when we ask, "When have you heard God speaking to you?" They look at us like we expect them to be hearing voices or receiving text messages from God. Then we have to explain, "Like, has your conscience ever clued you in that you're doing the wrong thing? Or all of a sudden you know the **right** thing to do? Or: have you ever had an insight that you knew came from outside not inside?" God can be like a ventriloquist speaking through human intermediaries. God often appears in disguise.

A God-incidence, a faith moment, isn't often as dramatic as Paul being struck by lightning and blinded on his way to Damascus. **When have you experienced God's presence?**

On Wednesday evening, March 4, Pastor Mark is going to give the midweek Lenten devotion and share some God-moments during his recent hospitalization. Sometimes we experience God's **presence** in an especially powerful way during illness or in the wake of an accident. But sometimes that's when we experience God's **absence** in a scary way. Hearing others' faith stories can strengthen our faith and clue us into what our faith story

might be, what disguise God might be wearing, through whom God might be speaking. Sometimes it's something happy like pregnancy or birth that sharpens our experience of God. Sometimes it's something sad and traumatic, like unemployment or natural disaster.

I think folks sometimes choose not to share their faith story because they see it as tooting their own horn. But when we share a faith story we're actually tooting **God's** horn. At the end of today's Gospel Jesus tells Peter, James & John that "mum's the word" 'til after the resurrection. Well, **we're** not sworn to silence like they were! Jesus' word to us is the same as it was to the poor Gadarene demoniac from whom He cast out a "Legion" of demons: "**Go... and tell what the Lord has done for you!**" Our faith family is in need of folks willing to give an 8-10 minute devotion during midweek Wed. evening worship between March 11 and April 1; we're looking for writers of Lenten e-devotions between now and Holy Week; and we're on the prowl for contributors of 2-3 page reflections for our Book of Faith.

For those with eyes to see, we've **all** seen the glory of God. For those with a faith perspective, we've **all** spent at least fleeting moments on the mountaintop. Let's share those experiences with others who may feel consigned to spend their entire life in base camp rather than on the mountaintop. Amen

¹*New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), p. 881, quoting G. Henton Davies, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1967), p. 193.

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