

Last Sunday After the Epiphany  
Feast of the Transfiguration  
Exodus 24:12-18  
Psalm 2  
2 Peter 1:16-21  
Matthew 17:1-9

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, and also the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus. And so this morning we hear about two situations in which God makes the Divine Presence known to human beings on Earth: to Moses on Mount Sinai; and to Peter, James and John, probably on Mount Hermon. You'll remember that we talked about how Jewish tradition has it that God is experienced on mountaintops. Well, Jesus's transfiguration happens on a mountain, in keeping with that tradition.

You probably also remember that on the first Sunday after the Epiphany we heard something very similar to what we hear God saying in today's Gospel. In that baptismal story, Matthew tells us, "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Today, on the last Sunday after the Epiphany, we hear a similar proclamation in the Transfiguration story: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him." These two dramatic stories of the revelation of who Jesus is—of the epiphany of who Jesus is—serve as bookends to our Epiphany season. In this way we experience his divinity before we enter into the season of Lent in order to intensify our realization that God, in the form of Jesus, is going to give Godself as a sacrifice for us.

But we have weeks before we get to that sacrifice. Let's look for a minute at Matthew's account of the Transfiguration.

Peter, James and John are often seen as Jesus's inner circle of disciples, and on this day Jesus takes them with him on a trip up a mountain for prayer and rejuvenation. Jesus is often seen doing this, sometime entirely alone. Trips like this might have been very common for his disciples; they expected that Jesus would do this from time to time, and likely didn't expect anything unusual to happen. However, today is very different.

Once they reach the top, Jesus's "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." This is in keeping with what happened to Moses after he was with God on Mount Sinai; his face shone because he had been with God—it seems to be what happens when human beings come into contact with the Divine. Then Moses and Elijah suddenly appear out of nowhere and begin talking with Jesus. Remember, Moses was the giver of the Law, and Elijah was the prophet who prophesied the coming of the Messiah. The fact that these two are with Jesus in this event shows that Jesus and his teachings are in continuity with Jewish tradition. And, that Jesus is the Messiah.

Well, all of these events are too much for the disciples. You can imagine how it might have been for them. Yes, they are used to seeing Jesus perform miracles, but this is amazing, even for him. They are so shaken they don't know what to do. Peter's suggestion that he make three huts or tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah is a typical thing to suggest when you're so staggered that you need to DO something. Anything—hey, what do you say—let's build three huts!

But while Peter is suggesting this, the bright cloud comes down, the *shekhinah* of God, and God speaks: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; LISTEN TO HIM!"

If the disciples had thought things were intense before, that was nothing in comparison to this. I think that if I had heard God say this to me from out of a cloud, I would have thrown myself on the ground in terror, too. This is the ultimate “mountaintop experience.” This is the experience that you never forget, that transforms your life, that shapes your actions forever afterward.

But Jesus tells them NOT to be afraid, and when they look up, everything is normal, and it’s just Jesus with them. So they go back down the mountain with Jesus, and their life seems to be just as usual. That’s the way it is. If we have the mountaintop experience, we then go back to our regular lives. Like Peter, James and John, we can’t STAY on the mountaintop. As human beings we can’t survive that constant intensity. The challenge is to remember the mountaintop so that it DOES transform your regular life. So that you see God in your regular life, not just on the mountaintop.

And what if you haven’t ever had a mountaintop experience? What if all of this seems impossible? Then you have a very similar challenge, because as Christians we need to look for God in everyday life. We have much more everyday life than we do life on the mountaintop, after all. Instead of waiting for God to be revealed in some extraordinary way, you get out of bed every day, and watch for the face of Christ in the people around you. In the woman panhandling at the stoplight. In the clerk who smiles at you as you check out. In the bearded, heavily tattooed man who motions for you to go at the stop sign, even though he has right-of-way.

Recognizing God at work in ordinary life can be hard, especially when we have annoyances, or trauma, or grief. We all have times when seeing God in our lives, or even wanting to look for God, seems like it’s too hard. But the hard times are the times when it’s especially important to remember that God is in the mundane. God sent us Jesus to show us the way for each day, and to teach us how to see God all the time. It’s easy to see God at work when things are going well—and it’s good to

realize that. Don't misunderstand me. But the challenge can be to realize that Jesus is sitting **with** you in your suffering. God is **carrying** you through your confusion and pain. The Holy Spirit is giving you strength to get through your struggle.

So be grateful if you've had a mountaintop experience. Remember it, and let it transform you. Let it help you to find Jesus in YOUR everyday life. And if you haven't had a transcendent experience, still look for Jesus. He might not show up the way you expect. In fact, he probably will be very different. But he'll be there.

Amen.

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