
Good Morning – Our God Pause thought for this Transfiguration Sunday is Transformation – we spend a moment contemplating what this word means in our lives – how we are open to being transformed to day – or maybe what’s blocking this possibility in our lives...Prayer: “God of Promise, we long for mountain tops, but you know our need better than we; so we give thanks that in Jesus, our Lord, you have chosen to come to dwell with us here "on the plain" and to be a bright vision of hope in the midst of our darkness. Amen.”

Today, our Gospel lesson is the story of the Transfiguration, which can be a perplexing concept to grasp. According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary; transfiguration means a change in form or appearance, an exalting, glorifying, or spiritual change. When it is capitalized it is connected to a Christian feast, which commemorates the transfiguration of Christ on a mountaintop in the presence of three disciples and that is observed on August 6 in the Roman Catholic and some Eastern churches and on the Sunday before Lent in most Protestant churches.

The concept is still somewhat baffling even if the details seem simple enough: They "went up on the mountain to pray," and great things happened. "To have a “mountaintop experience” it is not enough to go up on top of a mountain; it is what happens there.

-- In today's reading we find Peter, James, and John at the foot of a mountain. It may have been Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor. Jesus takes these three disciples to the top of mountain, where he is suddenly transformed -- or transfigured -his face changes and his clothes become dazzling white.
-- Then Moses and Elijah -- both long dead -- appear with Jesus and talks with him.

-- Peter, one of the three disciples, advocates building three booths or dwelling places -- one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah -- but a voice from heaven interrupts, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen, my beloved; listen to him!"

Why does the Bible include this odd story? It must mean something! What could it be? What meaning does it have for us today? Have you ever had a mountain top experience such as this? For a moment recall any moments in your life where you have experienced something life changing – the birth of a child, a near death experience, meeting someone new – or a religious encounter which sparked something life changing – life altering – that transformed or that was transfiguring for you – what was it like? How did it change you? How did you know it was more than just an emotionally charged moment that was fleeting without substance? A transfiguring experience is transforming – it changes an individual and the direction in which they are going. It can also be frightening and peaceful at the same time. People who have been close to death often say that even though they were initially frightened that fear was alleviated when it was realized that they were at peace with either death or life – either would be ok.

I would like to tell you about one of my mountain top experiences which has now become one of my peaceful places that I journey to on a regular basis: My final quarter of college was spent involved in an internship with the camp where I had worked and attended from Jr High even through Seminary; Green Lake Bible Camp, Spicer, MN 56288. My internship was to develop a leadership training program for High School aged young people who were interested in becoming staff members when they became college age individuals. It was such a
wonderful opportunity for me to do something I was really interested in and earn college credit at the same time. I spent almost 3 months developing and implementing a structure for this program which became a model for this camp and other camps throughout the country – but this wasn’t my Mountain Top Experience.

As I mentioned, this was my last quarter and I was to graduate at the end of Summer Session. One thing about working at camp for me and many others was the close relationships which were developed over the summer, which have continued throughout the years, even to this day. A small group of camp friends had discussed going backpacking after camp was finished in August and invited me to join them. I really wanted to go but it was going to conflict with my college graduation. I discussed this with my friends and my mom and it was decided that going backpacking in the Big Sky Country of Christikon Bible Camp in Montana would be a wonderful experience. My friends said that we would have a graduation ceremony on top of the Mountain at the exact same time as my graduation from college. So off I went, to climb a mountain with my friends.

I had never been backpacking in the mountains before, and neither had 6 of the 8 people on the trip, but we had chased kids around all summer and climbed up and down a few very large hills at camp, for what seemed like hundreds of times. So, we thought we were ready for anything until we looked at the Mountain before us. One person seemed to speak for all of us – “We are going to climb to the top of that?” Some anxiety seemed to set it – but we were reassured by the experienced hikers among us that we could do it, so off we went – to climb a mountain and experience God, while not being eaten by bears!
After 3 days of hiking – experiencing the fresh air and beauty of the creation all around us - which seemed overpower any of the body odor or personal hygiene issues we had – we camped by one of the most beautiful mountain lakes I have ever seen, with a wonder water fall flowing down into it. So Amazing! It was at that spot where I graduated from college, with my sleeping bag as my robe, stocking cap as my miter and the maps we carried as my diploma. Words were said, prayers were prayed and God was experienced – in majesty and awe!

We stayed at this spot for two days but needed to keep moving in order to keep to our schedule, but I like the others, I thought “Wouldn’t it be great just to stay there – forever” – oh yeah I forgot to mention – when the moon came up the first night it was so full and so close – I felt like I could reach out and touch it – the brightness of the moon was as transforming as any other part of the experience of that place – It was just wow.//

So – when I am in the dentist chair I go to this peaceful place in my mind – this place that was/is transforming and life changing for me – it is more than a memory – it is my peaceful place – in the middle of chaos or just daily life it helps me to know God – to identify Jesus – to inspire me to see and be a follower of the beloved and chosen one of God.

Do you have places like this? They don't have to be literally on a mountain top like the one I described – they can be anywhere where you experience God – A God Moment. As we go into the Season of Lent we once again hear the message from God saying: "This is my SON, my chosen. Listen to him." He will not lead you astray. "Listen to him." Hang on every word! Don't miss anything! Take notes! "Actively listen to him."
That was good advice for those early disciples and it is good advice for us now. As permanent as mountains seem, they can be fleeting. Mountaintop experiences are fleeting, they are momentary. We or I wanted to stay on that Mountain forever – but reality set in and so would winter! But, we long for these type of experiences or we hear about others experiences – you hear about mine and think – “Well, I have never had an experience like that.” Ok – but you have had your own experiences. I made a choice between attending my college graduation, which is something I had looked forward too – I chose a different experience – which transformed my life in a way I wasn’t expecting – it caught me off guard. I encourage you to allow yourself to “get caught off guard today!” by the wonder and splendor of God. Planning or “worrying” about everything takes the mystery and majesty out of the process. Of course there are decisions which need to be made – but you can’t Micro-manage everything and you certainly can’t “Micro-manage” God!

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a moment of revelation that extends and exists beyond the mountaintop experience. Luke’s account tells of the radical revelation of a mountaintop experience which is interrupted by reality. Luke helps us to know that proclaiming the good news of the Gospel means that the needs of everyday life which are revealed to us on the mountains and the valleys of life. The challenge is for us to consider if we are able to handle this type of experience of God in our midst? There is a lot more space to work with in the valleys than on the Mountain Peaks, and that can sound overwhelming. The promise is that God is with us in the middle of it all when we hear these words of grace: “This is my chosen one – Listen to Him.”