

What happens when what you've known to be true...

... and what you hope to be true ...

... and whom you've loved as the truth ...

...met in one singularity of purpose ...

...so your eyes water and your ears ring?!

Would such a moment change your life and shape your life journey?

May our God--- the beginning and end of our past, present, and future---  
shine upon us as we look toward this gift here today. Amen.

---

Transfiguration Sunday each year, we remember the story of the transfiguration of Jesus, meeting Moses, and Elijah, in a cloud, on the mountain, AND having, if we watch closely, a transforming effect on followers who are with him along the way.

This Transfiguration takes place in Matthew's Gospel, just six days after Jesus begins to show his disciples that he MUST go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter (the disciple who suffers from interminable hoof-in-mouth disease) takes Jesus aside to "rebuke" and correct him.

That's why Jesus says to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine purposes but on those of humans." And Jesus then drops this bomb: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. [And besides,] what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Is there anything in this world worth your life?" (16:24-26)

Those are difficult words for Jesus-followers to hear. "I'm turning toward my suffering and death in Jerusalem," says Jesus. "Y'all should follow me and give up your lives too."

Now **there's** a catchy marketing slogan!

Maybe that's why in today's story the circle of 12 disciples is down to three: Just Peter, James and John climb this mountain.

Not only does this seem lonely and quiet, they climb in a cloud. Yet when they reached the top, Jesus was transfigured in spectacular light.

Then after Jesus lights up like a lighthouse in the fog, Elijah and Moses show up and the three of them start talking to each other.

And Peter chimes in, "This is really cool! Let's create a church festival of tents to capture this moment." But before he can even finish his thought, God interrupts .... which, God's allowed to do, you know ... SOMETIMES God interruptions are the real calling in the moments of life ... here God interrupts with simple, clear instructions: "This is my beloved son. Listen to him."

Get a sense of this moment: what began six days earlier in the storm of confusion and disappointment, continues with a journey in the fog of silence and uncertainty, to come to luminous mountain top revelation, in communion with the truth of Moses and the hope of Elijah. And this foggy-mountain-high culminates as the feeble attempt-at-following is interrupted by the very voice of God saying "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

No wonder they were afraid:

Lightning and thunder ... transfiguration and visitation ... a discernable voice from heaven ...all in a singularity of purpose and call!

And I think the disciples were transformed. Because when what you've known to be true... and what you hope to be true ... the one you follow as the embodiment of truth all meet with a singularity of purpose and are blessed of God ... your eyes will water and your ears will ring and your heart will either stop or change.

Wouldn't such a moment change your life? Has it?

I remember a wonderful experience on an airplane. We took off in a storm. A thick layer of clouds blanketed the sky; the wind had kicked up; we could hear the rain on the fuselage; and outside the windows looked like pea soup. It was one of those white-knuckle takeoffs. We shot down the runway and seemed to claw our way into the air, buffeted about by the winds and rain.

Catholics were crossing themselves, Protestants were saying the Lord's prayer, and atheists were reconsidering their options.

But then our plane punched through the clouds and everything was transfigured! It wasn't just the light--- although that was stunning. And it wasn't just that the turbulence stopped--- although that was a welcome relief.

As we looked at the clouds from heaven's side of the storm, things were different. We were different.

It wasn't just a change of perspective (or our recent survival of certain death ;- ) our priorities changed. Where our focus had been on the storm or on our own survival, we began to notice our neighbors.

Folks turned and smiled at each other. They started talking again.

More seasoned travelers shared about how this had happened to them before and it was nothing to worry about. Children started to smile again and ask for advice on what to do with their air-sickness bags. Flight attendants started distracting us with beverage choices and the captain assured us "this slight, momentary affliction was preparing us for an eternal weight of glory" but we should stay seated with our seatbelts securely fastened... just in case."

There is something transformational about moments immediately after we prepare to meet our Maker... those moments when all the idols and false purposes of our life are set aside and we recategorize everything in life... and there comes a singularity of truth and hope with the clarity of the voice of God.

It is a moment of simplicity and focus. A moment when we stop trying to re-shape God to suit our needs and instead feel our entire lives yielding to the loving purpose of God. Like clay in the potter's hands or earth laid open behind the farmer's plow or disciples who now follow their self-giving Lord with a self-giving love.

Faith, hope and love were met at the top of that mountain; love led the faithful back down.

And the people who climbed up that mountain were transformed by the mystery they encountered there --- not because of their ability to capture and house it in tents or tabernacles or temples. But because they experienced it and listened within it and changed because of it.

[Nada te turbe illustration]

Let nothing trouble you.

Solo Dios Basta

In her sermon about this type of encounter Barbara Brown Taylor said, "Certainties can become casualties in these encounters, or at least those certainties that involve clinging to static notions of who's who and what's what, where you are going in your life and why. Those things can shift pretty dramatically inside the cloud of unknowing, where faith has more to do with staying fully present to what is happening right in front of you than with being certain of what it all means. The meeting--that's the thing."

This is what it means to live faith simply. Without pretense or pressure but with invitation to look and the guidance to know in which direction. Without creeds that control but with ears that listen and the sense to know to which voice.

And this changes the mission of those who see and hear.

It transforms us if we'll let it.

I've been reflecting on the tectonic shift in the world and the church recently. And there are many voices calling the church to change to meet these needs. Many of these voices are helpful and hopeful.

I started getting all kicked up about the idea of repurposing the church to meet the needs of the present generation. And I'm not opposed to changing things in the church. I've got a list of my own I'd like to start with. And in fact, for Brethren who pride themselves on humility and have an unwritten doctrine of simple living --- that is, removing anything alternate gods in competition for our heart, our time and our allegiance --- there should be nothing in our practice that replaces our purpose.

So I've been quite interested in the ideas of the emerging church movement and the missional church challenge and the creative approaches to recapturing the vitality and calling of faith.

Yet I've had this nagging feeling that much of what is being recommended is a lot like building holding-tents to accommodate spectacular experiences on mountaintops or shaping worship to reflect the worshippers instead of that which we worship.

The challenge being issued by God's voice from the cloud is not that we should repurpose the church to satisfy people but that we might be a church that repurposes people .... that we reconnect people with God's incarnate love.... reconnect people with the purpose toward which they were formed.

So many folks write nowadays about repurposing the church what I see in scripture as our mission is that the Body of Christ is about repurposing people. We are not called to repair, renew or repurposing the church. We're called to be the repurposing church.

Jesus' call is to "Repent – to turn; because the kingdom of heaven is near." It's an invitation to repurpose people not churches.... to invite people into the mountaintop cloud of unknowing to become fully known. It's a stunningly simple purpose with a life-time's worth of practice.

It's the call to give up your life in order to gain it, to turn toward Jerusalem and the self-giving love of Christ's cross.

I'm struck how the end of our story this morning reads like marching orders for this journey of faith. It's as though Peter James and John are you and I and our neighbor.

As we come to the season of Lent this Wednesday we are blessed with the Annual Invitation to head to your own mountaintop cloud and pray. This is our chance to enter our own cloud-of-unknowing and listen to what God may have to say to us.

Let's approach this season of discernment and listening on purpose with the words of Jesus ringing in our ears: "Get up; do not be afraid."

Because when what you've known to be true... and what you hope to be true ... and the one you've loved as the truth ...met in a singularity of purpose ... your eyes water and your ears ring and your life will change.

Amen.