

Message
The Transfiguration of Our Lord
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36
February 13-14, 2010
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So, it's cold outside and there's snow on the ground. And, it seems as though this winter season is just locked in for a while. We're all wondering, when we're ever coming out of this winter white. Well, today, believe it or not, marks a turning point. Maybe not in the weather, but in the life of the Church, a brightness that makes winter white pale by comparison. This is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means revelation, God's presence made known. On Wednesday, after we've stuffed ourselves with pancakes from Shrove Tuesday, we'll begin the penitential season of the church year, Lent. Lent, is the 40 days before Easter where we take on disciplines, practices, that draw us into a closer, more loving, intimate, trusting relationship with Christ. This last Sunday of Epiphany is typically the time where we get Jesus in a *big way*, revealed in all his brilliance and outstanding radiance, sparkling bright and white. Today, we get a mountain top experience of the pivotal story of Jesus' transfiguration and our invitation to journey along with him.

The Transfiguration may have taken place on Mount Tabor in Galilee. Mount Tabor is first mentioned in the book of Joshua; the story of God's people settling in Canaan after the Exodus. Because of its strategic location, where it controls the junctions between the north and the south, the east and the west; and because of its particular formation, Mount Tabor has served as the site of many battles and as a beacon of light throughout the valley. The disciples have been to mountain tops with Jesus before. It's on the mountaintop where Jesus summons his disciples, picks the twelve, instructs them, and sends them out. It's on the side of the mountain where he tells them to feed the 5,000. So, they know mountain top times. And, they'll know more mountain top times. Upon their descent, Jesus will turn his face toward Jerusalem. And, in just eight short days, his disciples will follow him up the Mount of Olives to pray, where Jesus will be seized and led away to his death and resurrection. And, it's at the foot of Calvary where the disciples will witness with horror and disbelief his crucifixion. On the climb Jesus takes his inner circle, Peter, James and John. It's about a 2,000 foot hike to the top of Mount Tabor; something like taking 4,340 stair steps. In Jesus' time Mount Tabor was wild with vegetation. So, I imagine it's a slow ascent up the mountain with lots of obstacles along the way. The path is too narrow, the turns are too sharp, the wind is blowing, the sun beating down. There may not be a lot of conversation among this inner circle. Maybe they've already started praying, trying to wrap their arms around Jesus' earlier words: *The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the last day.* Then, as if that isn't enough to swallow, he gives conditions for following. Every day we're going to *take up our cross; to save our life, we're going to have to lose it, for him; the kingdom of God isn't just coming, it's here now!* No wonder the three fall asleep once on top.

We can't do justice to mountain top experiences. When we're blessed with such amazement and wonder; when we're just frozen in the radiance of such glory, it catches our breath. It's hard to give it words. I imagine that's exactly how it is for Peter, James

and John when they wake up only to be blinded at the glory that is before them in Jesus Christ. Their hearts must be leaping. Here, right before their very eyes stands every bit of their faith: Moses and Elijah, ancient authorities of the Law and the Prophets, signs of the old exodus. Now, coupled with Jesus, the new deliverer. It's Jesus, this brilliantly transfigured savior who leads God's people out of the bondage of sin, and into the promise of new life, redeemed, loved, made whole. It's hard to make sense of it all. No wonder; with such astonishing glory before him Peter wants desperately to capture the moment and box it all up and tie it up with a pretty ribbon. Instead, God says, listen. So that's what we do. Hopefully, we'll just stop for a moment in all the wonder and amazement, and listen. Listen to the voice of God speaking, "This is my Son, the Chosen One!" Listen to the still small voice within us telling us that mountain top experiences change our lives; that in all their glory and excitement, and celebration, they can disturb and disrupt; that when we come down the mountain we come down filled with the Spirit, covered in Christ and we see with a boldness that gives us strength and courage to find glory even in the ugly parts of life, and especially in the ordinary; that we live with hope and trust, knowing full well that there will be other mountain top times, other times to climb and descend with the richness of Christ within us. So Jesus leads them down the mountain; and they're all glistening bright and bubbling over. No more holding back. They've got Jesus and he's got them.

Jesus doesn't stay on the mountain top. He comes down and with the glory of his brightness washed upon our faces, he brings us with him. He comes down to the young boy possessed by a demon and frees him. He comes down and restores sight to the blind man, lays healing hands on the crippled woman, and cleanses the lepers. He comes down, and gathers his followers, he teaches and instructs, over and over again, drawing us closer and closer, equipping us to be his healing hands and feet of justice and righteousness. He brings us down the mountain, he heals, and soothes and reassures. He outfits us for his work, and includes us in his mission, because there's work to be done down the mountain, and he needs us.

Disciples of Christ in Community is a class, an adventurous journey where we discover God in our lives and seek to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ and one another. In our DOCC class we spend some time talking about two forces, our human need, our purpose, and God's call for us to obey. In other words, we're in pursuit of a relationship with God. We explore this during class, by sharing our stories. We chart those pivotal times in our lives that have formed us; times of joy and sorrow, highs and lows. They're largely roller coaster stories, with ascending and descending slopes to realization and reckoning, up and down, sometimes flat planes as well, where we simply sit and wait. Then, after we've charted our stories, we draw another line marking how we've known God in our story. Usually, we discover that it's not our pursuit of God. But, rather, God, has in fact, come down the mountain, grabbed our hand and pursued us, pulling us up. Wise scholar A. W. Tozer says it this way: "the impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him." (A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*.) In other words, ***God is always previous.***

When Moses goes up the mountain to talk with God, he comes face to face with God. He emerges, his face brilliantly bright, changed. As he descends, the Israelites are frightened by Moses' changed appearance. So, Moses is in the habit of veiling his face when talking with his people after his encounters with God. The apostle Paul writes in

his letter to the people of Corinth, that transfiguration of Christ on that mountain top is our transfiguration as well. In Christ, we are transformed, made free. No longer do we need to veil ourselves. We're free to be fully exposed in the delight of Christ's love for us, to be all we're called to be. That's not to say we're not up the mountain again. For certain we are; because it's the mountain top times that help us discover who we are in Christ and give us strength for the foot of the mountain.

Friday night, I had a tiny mountain top experience. Now, keep in mind, mountain top experiences are not the same for every one. So, Friday night, along with 750 or so of my closest women friends, and about 4 men, we gathered downtown to soak in the brilliance of author, Anne Lamott. Anne, you know is the author of several non fiction works, Bird by Bird, Traveling Mercies, Grace Eventually; and some novels as well. She's blatantly honest and truthful. Anne lives unveiled. Friday night, she shared with us two mountain top experiences. One, the birth of her grandson, Jacks. The other, her trip to India from which she just returned several weeks ago. This was a true mountain top experience for Anne; something she's wanted to experience since she was a young girl. Right away she loved every bit of India: the brightness of colors, the noise, the smells, the throng of people. She was overwhelmed by the glory and wonder of her experience. At the same time, she was overwhelmed by the misfortune of so many. She shifted back and forth between awe and despair. One wise local told her they call that: hungry, chungy, chilly, milly. Anne calls herself a good little Christian girl. Caught up in the dichotomy of hungry, chungy, chilly, milly, Anne wanted to do what all good little Christian girls want to do. She wanted to fix everything; order all the chaos. She couldn't fix it. Instead, she painfully admitted, "I'm no one's savior." So, she just had to listen for a bit. After a while she found she just had to take off her mask and trust and surrender to God working in all his glory. And, when she did, to the best of her ability, she discovered that *she was at her least separated from God*. Anne went on to say, that the revelation of the trip was that she didn't get what she wanted. For Anne, she added, not getting what she wants, drives her crazy. Instead, to get through the hungry, chungy, chilly, milly she just had to live unveiled, as open and trusting and truthful as possible, exposing her soul to God. I can tell you, Anne's down from the mountain, unveiled, and she's beaming.

I love the way Jesus gives us these mountain top moments, in all their confusion and glory; for how he fills us up with his love and grace and mercy; for how he stands right in our path and shines all over us fueling us up for the ride down. We all want mountain top experiences and Jesus is letting us know, pretty clearly, that he's very present for us to receive his glory. So, I wonder if we need to ask a mountain top question? ***What veil must we remove to live in the full glory of God in Christ? What is it that holds us back from living with the complete revelation of Christ in our life?*** With Christ, we need not live veiled. Jesus' transfiguration for us gives us permission to live our whole life in the full presence of God in Christ, to see complete joy in every minute of every day.

Recently, a man came in my office and shared with me that he just learned his company is going to have some "reorganization." He's a high level employee for a firm that follows a very honest and truthful code of ethics. He models this same behavior in his personal life. It would be fair to say that his career path with this fine company has in many ways been a mountain top experience. He has known God in this time. Next week

he meets with his boss. His intuition tells him that he'll probably be demoted into a position where his skill set can be better utilized in the "reorganization." It's a time of unveiling for this very thoughtful and prayerful man. He's giving it to God, and he's letting Jesus bring him down the mountain where already, he knows that at the foot of the mountain, all is well.

What veil must we remove to come down the mountain? Because, the truth is, it's at the foot of the mountain where we do most of our living. I'm not just talking about the dark valleys; certainly we know the glory of Jesus in those bleak times. I'm talking about the every day, comings and goings, ins and outs of our lives. There's work to do at the foot of the mountain. Today, we have an annual meeting. We're going to say goodbye to a fine class of 5 vestry members who for three years have served pivotal roles with ten other members, bringing us very successfully through the roller coaster ride of building. We'll invite by acclamation, 5 new vestry members. We'll give thanks for how God blesses us with vitality and growth and our new space. We'll rejoice at how God calls us to new beginnings, here in our own backyard, in our neighborhood, and in the world. These are just some of the things we do when we come down the mountain, veiled not in question and doubt, but shining in the power of Christ's glory.

We give thanks for how mountain top time lead us to honest, truthful, open, trusting, mountain climbing, mountain descending, up and down, flat and bumpy, roller coaster living, transfigured, brighter, and more beautiful, as God enters our lives and we become more like him.