

Mark 9: 2-9
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Transfiguration Sunday

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Jesus took Peter, James and John and went up a high mountain. Where does your mind go when you hear this line? Anybody think of the Sound of Music, Climb Every Mountain? How about the Friendly Giant...look up, look waaaay up! No matter what we think of initially when we hear about Jesus going up a mountain we know one thing for sure, something big is about to happen.

In fact whenever someone in the Bible is trying to get close to God they go up a mountain. Moses sees the burning bush on a mountain; received the ten commandments up the mountain and spent 40 days and 40 nights up a mountain. The prophet Isaiah uses the image of mountains in a number of writings referring to God's house as the highest of the mountains in chapter 2 vs.2. Mountains play a large part in the images we have of being near God. The images that help us envision the events that we read about. We know it will be big because it involves a mountain.

So, it should come as no surprise that Jesus takes a few disciples and goes up a mountain; what is surprising is what happens up that mountain. The event that takes place is referred to as the Transfiguration; the moment in Jesus' life where we find out, without a doubt, who Jesus really is. Jesus is transformed before the disciple's very eyes. He begins to glow like a bright light all shiny white, his clothes, his skin, his hair, everything about Jesus is shining. And that's not all! Appearing out of nowhere, standing with Jesus, talking to Jesus is Moses and Elijah, two of the most prominent men of ancient Israel.

Peter, James and John are awestruck. They cannot even respond, no words could express what they were feeling, that mix of terror and excitement. How could this be? And yet here it is before them. How can this occasion be marked? Surely, it must be preserved and remembered somehow. It only seems fitting that they should erect some kind of housing for them, shrines really, to mark such an occasion.

Peter, James and John are experiencing a mountain top moment. Believe it or not we have all experienced such moments in our lives. For some it is their wedding day or the birth of their child. For some it is being the recipient of an award or landing that perfect job. Mountain top moments are those times in our lives when we would like to stop the world and stay in that high place for as long as possible. It is that place of euphoria.

The problem with euphoria is that too often we chase it or expect it to be with us all the time. We have somehow gotten the impression that we should be in this euphoric place all the time. Where did we get that idea? Certainly this was not the case for our ancient ancestors, the Israelites. Does it come from a place that expects the Holy to shield us

from the real world? Have we misunderstood or forgotten the meaning and purpose of Holiness and Sabbath?

Sr. Joan Chittister a writer and Executive Director of an American Resource Centre for contemporary spirituality says this about Holiness and Sabbath, "The purpose of Holiness is to change the way we live in the world, not for our own sake but for the sake of others". And she says this about Sabbath, "The rabbis tell us that the Sabbath exists not because God needed rest, God never needs rest but rather because God demanded rest for us. God wanted Sabbath to equalize the rich and the poor, so that the poor could be free for at least one day and the rich could no longer oppress them. God wanted Sabbath to give us time to evaluate our work as God evaluated God's work, to see if our work was equally as good. Sabbath gives us time to reflect on the meaning of life."

As we reflect on this story of the Transfiguration we should keep in mind that in every ancient language of religious writings, Greek, Hebrew, Roman and Asian mountains were the places where one could touch the divine. It is here that these few disciples see Jesus in a new way, transformed, dazzling, enlightened, different.

It is important to note who appears with him, Elijah a prophet and Moses, the one who lead the slaves to freedom. Why not King David or Aaron the priest? They were important people of the past? The answer is simple; Elijah and Moses lived in the "real" world, with the oppressed, facing their same problems; not as royalty and rulers away from the real world.

Peter wants to stay and build places of honour. He is caught up in the moment, he is not paying attention until he hears Gods voice, Listen; "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" In other words, pay attention Peter, listen to what God is saying to you, to us. You can't stay on the mountain top, held up in a shrine. The world needs you in it, present, participating. And so Jesus leads them down the mountain to the hurting people below filled with the transforming light of God, through Christ.

Real religion writes Sr. Joan, "is not about building temples and keeping shrines. Real religion is about healing hurts, speaking for and being with the poor, the helpless, the voiceless and the forgotten who are at the silent bottom of every pinnacle, every hierarchy and every system in both state and church, church and state.

Real religion, the scripture insists, is not about transcending life; real religion is about our transforming life. The gospel of the transfiguration calls us to Sabbath; calls us to become enlightened; calls us to change our attitudes about the role of religion; calls us to understand the nature of religion itself; because the so-called rational has failed."

She uses this example, "they say that militarism is rational. How else can we defend ourselves? Never before in history have we spent so much money on defence and never before in history, have been so vulnerable because of it. The people below, the people at the bottom of our mountains, wait to be healed of the diseases that spring

from our spiritual darkness. The poor wait for jobs; the homeless wait for shelter; children are waiting for food; young people are waiting for education and job training; the elderly are waiting for care that we say that we can't afford in the richest nation in the world.

Every year we go on in peace time spending more money on instruments of destruction than on the development of peoples. We create the end of the world and store it in the corn fields of Kansas while the working poor, the people who suffer under part-time pay for part-time work or double-time work for part-time pay, get poorer and poorer in this country and around the globe.

Religion, you see, does not call us to the rational. Religion calls us to the Beatitudes, to the works of mercy, to the casting out of demons, to the doing of miracles for those in need, to the being and act of irrational love and burning justice of God. That is what the Transfiguration is about, that is what religion is really about, changing ourselves so we can change the world.”

We cannot forget that the transfiguration is key in religion. Transfiguration demands enlightenment; with enlightenment we can change the world and see the world through the living Spirit that moves in the world through us. Once again it comes down to us. We are the transfigured people today; we have seen the glowing Jesus and have come down the mountain to bring that light to others. Amen