

Rev. Joshua D. Rinas

Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2021

Jesus only brought Peter, James, and John with him up the mountain. The rest of the disciples were still back down on the plain... So it was just these three who got to see Jesus' robe become miraculously white and glowing. And while Jesus was standing before them, two others appeared—Moses and Elijah, right in front of them! They must have been awestruck at seeing this sight—right in front of them!

And Peter said to Jesus: *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

Peter was perplexed and amazed at this happening—it was wonderful beyond reason... and he wanted to stay. *"Let's make huts up here – for you, and Moses, and Elijah too..."* This way, these leaders God had chosen could stay at the mountaintop and then Peter and the other disciples would be able to visit and see them and have this experience time and again...

Then a cloud came and out of it a voice-- *"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"*

And suddenly, there was no one around but Jesus.

They went down the mountain and Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain-top. He wanted Jesus and Moses and Elijah to stay there too. He didn't want that mind-blowing, dramatic experience to end.

What have been your experiences of God coming close? What have your mountain-peak views looked like?

The 1996 ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans was one of those for me. I was in high school in central Maine and while I had friends, I had none in school who were also part of my church experience or faith life. My peers were not religious; Maine was largely unchurched. I felt alone in my faith.

The group from our church spent a long time preparing for the trip to the Gathering. We met, we studied, we prayed. We were excited for the travel and the experience, even if we couldn't fully imagine what it would be like.

Travelling a couple days early allowed us to boat with alligators and see a NASA museum, but the Gathering really stood out. Throughout the city of New Orleans, everywhere we looked, we saw Lutheran youth filling the streets, out in service projects, packing every hotel, and most of all, filling the stadium. 37,000 of us made an impact. And it was when we all together for music and worship, all in the Superdome, that really bowled me over. I remember dancing and singing and ringing the dome all in some sort of conga line and I was just floored that there were so many other Lutheran kids there—with whom I shared faith and values.

It was an experience I wanted more and I chased it. I decided that I wanted to go to a Lutheran college after high school, so my college search shifted. Attending Gustavus gave me the opportunity to continue doing youth ministry with children and that led to another choice which eventually brought me here.

Wonderful, mountain-top experiences are exhilarating. It is understandable that Peter wanted to stay on the mountain-top. He had had a powerful experience there—and he wanted more. But understanding that Peter didn't want to go back down the mountain is a little like understanding that a child wants a second and third dessert. It makes sense, but it's not a mature response.

Well, having multiple desserts is not a mature decision as long as the hope is to grow up healthy, strong, and not vomit before bed. Staying at the top of the mountain where

Jesus was bathed in God's light and voice would be fine for tourists—but it wasn't acceptable for Jesus, and it's not for those who are his disciples.

Just before Lent, as we are now, Jesus is found on a mountain with some of his disciples—being glorified by God and pointed out as the Son of God himself. At the end of Lent, Jesus will again be found with some of his disciples on a mountain—this time nailed to a cross with his followers present, but they'll be trying to remain unnoticed.

In between these mountains, Jesus and his disciples go down the mountain to return to the plain to be with others. Jesus leaves his place of glory and the disciples walk from where the heavens opened up and God came through. They leave the place of amazement and praise for what God did and who God is—in order to return to the people they were called to serve.

They returned to feed the hungry, they sought out and assisted the poor, the disciples brought Jesus to the sick and dying, some of whom Jesus cured, all of whom they provided healing to in their visits.

In between our lofty experiences of God, of worship and praise, Jesus leads us back down the mountain to listen to the needs of others, to draw close to humans, to form relationships. Jesus does not remain in glory for himself, but goes to find those whom he can reach out to.

Christ continues to reach out, through Word and deed, through you and through me. Christ continues to form relationships that we might be transformed past our sinful selves to follow ever more closely.

“In the Eastern Orthodox celebration of the transfiguration, or “metamorphosis” in Greek, a common practice is a blessing of grapes. The blessing of ripe fruit symbolizes the fullness or ripeness of God's metamorphosis of the whole cosmos and all of humanity. On this day, we glimpse partially in Jesus Christ what God intends fully for

all reality at the end of time.” (members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources/2021-2-14/2184#resources) The priest will pray, “Bless, Lord, this new fruit of vine which reached ripeness because Thou kindly provided good weather, drops of rain and stillness. Let eating this fruit of vine make us joyful. And give us the honor of offering this fruit to Thee, as the gift of purging of sins, altogether with the Holy Body of Thy Christ.” (<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/orthodixie/2011/08/transfiguration-why-bless-grapes.html>)

Jesus Christ is not simply the man pointed out by God as the Son of God, but the Son of God who continually leaves himself and his glory to find the lonely, the poor, the sick, and the lame...

Until he goes to mount Galgatha to die that others might live.

Amen.