

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We stand on the precipice of the Sundays after Epiphany and the start of Lent.

For the second time, God speaks and declares Jesus a beloved son.

Jesus has gone up the mountain,  
a place thought to bring us closer to God.  
Peter, James and John are there with him.  
Suddenly his bodily being was luminescent.  
His face shone like the sun.  
And Moses and Elijah appear,  
talking with him.

Peter wants to enshrine this experience with tents,  
one for each of them.

God intervenes.

A bright cloud moves in casting shadows,  
and God's voice says,  
This is my Son, the beloved;  
with him I am well pleased;  
listen to him!

At the voice, the disciples fall to the ground,  
overcome with fear.

Jesus went to them,  
touched them on the shoulder and said,  
Get up now and do not be afraid.

I get why Peter wanted to make a permanent marker  
of these moments of Jesus shining,  
being visited by Moses and Elijah.  
Indeed, those were holy moments.  
Sacred events and when the tough moments came,  
maybe they would return to remember,  
return in hopes of another mountain top encounter with God.

I think we all want a mountain top experience.

And, it's ok to want them,  
understanding that it's on God's time,  
not ours.

It's ok to want that mountaintop experience,  
and know that if you don't ever get that experience,  
it doesn't mean you don't have faith.  
It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.  
It doesn't mean God isn't pleased with you.  
You are a beloved child of God.

It's ok to long for a mountaintop experience  
as long as you don't miss God coming to you in the  
mundane, ordinary moments of life  
at the post office,  
in the grocery checkout,  
in the neighborhood walk,  
in the greeting of your neighbor,  
in the bus driver's kindness.

If you only look for a mountaintop experience of God,  
we may miss the God alongside us at our lowest moments,  
in the doctor's office,  
at the bedside of our beloved,  
in the courtroom as the verdict is read,  
beside the young person struggling with their body image.

And that's our reality, too.  
Most of life doesn't glow luminescently.  
But all of life — *all of life* — contains the sacred.  
The challenge is to cultivate the kind of sight that  
perceives God in places darker, murkier,  
and more obscure than a mountaintop.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge is to cultivate our senses to  
feel Jesus touch our shoulder and  
hear him say, "Get up and do not be afraid".

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Debbie. [Journey with Jesus - Is It Good for Us to Be Here?](#)

And then Jesus takes them back down the mountain.  
And, that's the hard part.  
What's hard is consenting to follow Jesus back down the mountain.  
What's challenging is learning to cultivate awe and wonder  
in the face of the mundane.  
What's essential is finding Jesus in the rhythms and routines of the everyday.  
In the loving touch of a friend.  
In the human voices that say, "Don't be afraid."  
In the unspectacular business of discipleship, prayer, service, and solitude.  
In the unending challenge to love my neighbor as myself.<sup>2</sup>

And as they are almost to the others,  
Jesus tells them not to tell anyone until after the resurrection.  
Sometimes I think we take this to mean,  
don't ever tell anyone about a mountaintop or mundane encounter with God.

In 1995 there was a study done among  
100 United Church of Christ Congregations on the  
experiences and understanding of spiritual healing in people's lives<sup>3</sup>.  
Several thousand people answered two simple questions,  
first, what do the words "spiritual healing" mean to you,  
what do you associate with these words and second,  
what stories do you tell about  
spiritual healing according to your own definition?  
The word most associated with spiritual healing was "peace".  
The definition that emerged was spiritual healing  
"as the presence or action of God in one's life which was transforming".

Often a person discovered that  
the encounter with God occurred in the middle of  
ordinary life but transformed their world.  
Many times a person retelling the story of their encounter with God would  
recount those moments of long ago in a very significant way.  
Sharing their experiences was meaningful for  
the teller and the listener.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Religion and Healing in America By Linda L. Barnes, Susan Starr Sered; ch. 2 – McKay and Musil

But those who shared their stories said though they remembered their spiritual healing and the effect and the transformation of their lives in vivid detail, they rarely shared their story with another person.

Perhaps you have had an encounter or encounters with the divine, spiritual experiences that you have never shared with anyone. Whatever the encounter with God, a story of physical or spiritual healing, an 'aha' moment of understanding scripture or connection with another human being... whatever they are, we tend to keep them to ourselves for fear of being thought a fanatic, or of being challenged about our experience and not being able to explain what happened. I hope that will change. Let's share these encounters. It deepens our faith, builds community.

With Transfiguration Sunday, we come to the end of another liturgical season. Having seen the bright lights of Epiphany, we prepare now for the long darkness of Lent. We can't know ahead of time what mountains and valleys lie ahead. We can't predict how God will speak, and in what guise Jesus might appear. But we can trust in this: whether on the brightest mountain, or in the darkest valley, Jesus abides. Even as he blazes with holy light, his hand remains warm and solid on our shoulders. Even when we're on our knees in the wilderness, he whispers, "Do not be afraid." So listen to the ordinary. Keep listening. It is good for us to be here.<sup>4</sup> Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas, Debbie. [Journey with Jesus - Is It Good for Us to Be Here?](#)