

Sunday, February 19, 2023 Epiphany 7 Transfiguration *Transformed by Christ's Light*

**Exodus 24:12-18 Matthew 17: 1-9**

Holy moments take place in all types of settings: on top of mountains, beside lakes and rivers; within a building with cascading sunrays through coloured glass, sitting on a swing, or in one's room as you prepare for bed. Holy moments are those which are difficult to describe in circumstance, but also may not be articulated fully as words just don't seem strong enough or powerful enough for the experience. There is a moment of being unable to speak, or even a realization that there is the presence of someone bigger in the room or space. Being lost for words to describe a feeling or the emotional impact on that feeling calls us to see something that was not there before! These moments might even lead someone to say something that is not clear in meaning or wanting to contain the moments for what they are.

With the advent of cell phone cameras it seems that everyone wants to capture special moments- from what the food looks like on their plate to every flower that blossoms. But what we are speaking about are those special moments which take our breath away, leave us without words and when we are in awe or just needing silence.

Are you able to describe any such 'holy moment'? That is when you felt like you had to take off of your shoes because God's Presence was surrounding you? Or maybe you were praying with earnest desires and you felt the need to stop and look up to see who was with you when you knew you were alone. What about seeing something in creation that gave you an AHA moment when the beauty of creation overwhelmed you or that you were intentionally showing that you were in awe. What did you do?

This is Transfiguration Sunday which is a week that calls us to 'see' Jesus for who he is as God's Son and as Peter James and John experienced a holy special moment that they did not know what to do. It also marks the end of the Season after Epiphany where we have learned more about Jesus as the Light which came into the world and moves us toward the beginning of Lent which leads us to Jesus' passion story of love. Transfiguration is a word that is not often used in our everyday language because it does not occur regularly. Yet when it does—truth is revealed and light shines brightly.

Going up the mountain to see and be with God occurred when God wanted Moses to receive His message. This is what is shared in the story from Exodus 24. The message came to be known as the Ten Commandments, but something significant occurred when Moses was up on the mountain with God. For 6 days the cloud covered Mount Sinai. God's glory settled on the mountain. Then God called Moses. God's appeared like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel who were below in the valley. Moses entered the cloud and went up in the mountain. For 40 days and nights Moses was on the mountain. One can imagine his experience with God; on a mountainside with no food or water yet there he was with God. It is here that Moses is taking notes about the rules for the people of the desert to follow as they journey towards the Promised Land. Near the end of this time, God writes the commandments on stone and Moses returns to the people.

Moses moments with God involved a long time of learning about how people were to live God's ways and the laws under which they would exist. Moses heard everything from the construction of the tabernacle's structure to its décor and leadership. He learned about the Ark of the Covenant and how it was to be made and how the offering was to be prepared on the altar and burned. Moses was in God's presence as he learned about Sabbath law and the two tablets of the covenant written by God. This was a long time as the people on the plains below had given up on Moses' return and had turned away from God's laws and teachings. It is then that Moses returns to the mountain to atone for the sins of the people. Moses encountered God's presence and as he descended his face shone and frightened the people. He had experienced God's glory and needed to veil himself after each visit with God. Have you experienced God's presence so much that your physical appearance has changed? What about within? Has God's Spirit brought change within?

These holy moments are often difficult to describe to others. There is just a feeling of something good has happened because the Spirit has calmed you, there is no fear and rational thinking returns to a situation or event. And this is what Jesus shared with Peter, James and John that day on the mountain. The disciples had seen Jesus do many things to help others, teach people and feed thousands. Jesus has also told them of his death and resurrection and the taught about the cost of discipleship. Peter, James and John are invited on a hike up the

mountain with Jesus. And as Matthew 17:2 states, “he transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white.” But what does transfigured mean? The Greek word for this is metamorphosis which means change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means or the striking alteration in appearance, character, or circumstances. There was Jesus all bright and shiny and the disciples are not sure what is happening.

Standing beside Jesus is Moses and Elijah and they are talking together. Peter says “Lord it is good for us to be here, if you wish, I will make three dwellings here- one for each of you.” Just how Peter would accomplish this was unknown. It is also thought that he didn’t really understand what he had said. If this occurred when cell phones were existing I think Peter would have stopped the holy moment for a picture or two. But as Peter was talking a bright cloud overshadowed them all and from the cloud a voice was heard. “This is my Son, the Beloved with him I am well pleased, listen to him.”

The disciples fell on the ground and were overcome by fear. They had heard the voice of God and they were overcome by His presence. They did not know what to do or how to explain it at all. Just then Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up Jesus was alone and he appeared the same. Jesus then said it’s time to go home. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Don’t tell anyone about what you saw until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

What is the significance of this story about Jesus? Peter, James and John have witnessed many times the amazing things that Jesus has done—from miracles, to preaching, to teaching, feeding thousands, healing people. They are the ones close to Jesus and recognize him as the Messiah. But there are still times when they realize that he is a man as well. Jesus spoke to his disciples of his pending death and resurrection but they seemed to fluff it off as something not going to occur. So by taking these three disciples, they get to see him as divine—with holy people from history, glowing in glorious light and hearing God the Father’s voice acknowledging Jesus as His Son and commanding these disciples to follow him. Jesus changes in appearance

but maybe just maybe the brilliance of Jesus is his normal and what he shows to the world is his humanity.

Peter, James and John are told not to tell this experience to others until after Jesus' resurrection but at this point these men are unsure of anything including Jesus death.

As we consider this story for ourselves we must look to the Source of Light God- through Him, Jesus comes to us as the Light which shows us the way to live. Jesus changed in appearance and through the image of Elijah, Moses and Jesus talking they knew each other. But it is Peter's attempt to hold the moment that reminds us that we would do the same. This is because we who believe in Jesus follow in faith and when something extraordinary occurs we want to hold it in our hearts always. Yet as faithful people our lives contain many moments with God's Spirit being present, we just have to take a hike and look for them. We need to slow down and let God's light shine on us in a new way. We need to reflect Jesus brightness and to know again that he is God's Son.

As we begin Lent we need to see who Jesus is, understand why Jesus died for our sakes and what this might mean as we share and show our love for others in the way of Christ.

Jesus comes to us as the Light of the World because he is God's Son. As the voice spoke from the cloud which covered them all, we need to hear God's words – and listen to Jesus. We need to see with new hope and vision that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the one who dies and rises for us all. He is the beloved Son of God who comes to us and calls us to learn about him in faith and with hope. Let us rejoice for we are changed and become like Jesus by living and following His way. We are transformed by Christ to love him, serve others as we listen to him in faith and with hope.

LET US PRAY

God of grace we praise you for this transfiguration story and how you revealed Jesus as your Beloved Son, the Christ to the disciples. As we prepare to enter the Season of Lent we pray that we will discover Jesus in new ways as we seek to grow in faith and knowledge of him. We pray that you will bless us and guide us in this Lenten journey of hope. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

