

Transfiguration 2018: Down from the Mountain with a Light for the Dark Places

Introduction: Mountaintop Experiences

I have visited some places where I could have been content to stay for the rest of my life;

Places, moments, where if it had been my choice, if it had been within my power;

I would stop time and still be there right now;

And as much as I like being here,

There are moments when I would rather be there.

One came the summer I went on our church's mission trip to Uganda

When, after spending weeks among our friends at the schools we support,

Working with them to better their lives and to build for their future,

We left to spend several days in Kenya, on a game preserve.

Our first evening there, driving around in a converted van

Whose top lifted up so you could stand to get the best view of the animals,

We stopped in the middle of a road and saw a herd of elephants

Feeding in the distance.

As the sun began to set, the elephants began to move,

Began to walk directly toward us, more than a hundred of them.

In a matter of moments, we were surrounded by these magnificent creatures,

Close enough to reach out and to touch them

As they made their way to water and the protection of the trees for the night.

I could do that. I could stay there.

Then there are three days that I stood in a hospital room,

Holding a tightly wrapped bundle in my arms,

Looking into the eyes of each of our three sons.

Our eyes locked, connecting at a level beyond words,

Filled with a joy and a wonder and a sense of thanks that is indescribable even today,

I would like to go back there again, to those moments. I could stay there.

Or at the end of the aisle in St. James Episcopal Church in Great Barrington, Mass.;

One of my brothers singing the Wedding Song, I think,

We hadn't said our vows yet and I wasn't sure I could even say them,

Since we had mistakenly agreed to memorize them

And not repeat the words after the priest spoke them.

But there she stood.

Eyes bright, looking at me, and smiling that smile that still melts me;

It was so sparkling, so picture perfect, so amazing;

Neither of us having any idea what we were getting ourselves into;

And as wonderful as the years have been,

I could go and stand at that altar for a time,

Looking into her hopeful eyes and feeling the way she made me feel.

As nice as it is here, I could go back there in a minute.

At the Transfiguration

I think St. Peter would understand that. I think that whatever else happened in Peter's life,

And we have an awful lot of it recorded in the New Testament,

He would have given it all to go back,

And I think I know a couple of places he would have gone to stay.

One was with the resurrected Jesus by the Sea of Galilee

When Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to undo his three denials

To tell Jesus that he loved Him three times and so be restored

And one was a mountain.

Now nobody agrees today which mountain it was exactly,

Although there are two top contenders for the title.

But it was Jesus, James, John and Peter who went up;

The four of them walked up the mountain and when they reached the top it happened.

While they stood there together, Jesus' face began to change;
He began to glow or to shine like the light of the sun;
His clothing lit up like a laundry detergent commercial;
Jesus, revealed as He really is in the heavenly glory as God's only Son,
And then they were joined by two other men:
Moses, and next to him, Elijah.

Peter was overwhelmed and he made his decision right then and there,
He blurted out to Jesus, "It is good for us to be here
How about if I build us some shelters up here and we just stay?"

But before he could finish explaining the size and the shape of these shelters,
God interrupted and drove Peter, James and John to their knees,
(God has that way about Him sometimes)
And when they looked back up, it was over.
Jesus had started toward the trail back down the mountain,
But I think Peter would have liked to stay.

It happens that way.
Some of us here this morning have had that kind of experience,
The time in your life when you suddenly knew who Jesus really is
And found that you and the world looked different,
Now that you recognized Him.

It could have been one quiet Sunday morning coming forward for communion;
It could have been in some story of the scripture that brought His presence;
It could be in your private prayer, some moment of grace and presence.

Suddenly everything made sense, and what didn't make sense didn't matter anymore;
And you really wished that you could feel that feeling always and stay right there
Because coming down from the mountaintop is hard.

But we can't stay in these mountaintop moments
Life moves on, we move on with it.

And the truth is, these mountaintop moments are not the focus of our lives,
They're not the end that we are seeking or living for or longing to return to,
They are merely the glimpses of glory,
A light we carry with us in our hearts.

And as magnificent and as beautiful and as encouraging as they are,
As much as we would like to live in those moments forever,
They are but a taste of what lies before us in a living relationship
With God through Jesus Christ here
And the glory and the life in the heavenly realm that is being prepared for us even now.

We followers of Jesus are called to come down from the mountaintop
And to allow the grace of that light to shine in the darkness of our lives;
A light that we know or remember when God's grace has entered in
The light of Christ for our lives and for the life of the world.

Glimpses of Glory, Pressing On

Jesus comes down from the mountaintop,
Jesus comes down because that moment
Was not the reason He had come to live among us in human form;
He has an appointment in Jerusalem,
An appointment to redeem the world, to save the world,
Through His dying on a cross for our sins,
And His rising from the dead on Easter morning;
The resurrection that broke the hold of death on our lives forever.

Remaining on that mountaintop, revealed in all His glory,
Gave Peter and James and John a taste of what is to come,
But it wasn't the end point. Jesus had other work for them to do as well.

And because they came down from the mountaintop, too, and continued to follow Jesus
Because they came down to witness his dying and to experience His resurrection,
We and millions of others through the centuries
Now know the love that God has for us and the purpose He intends for our lives;
By the light they carried with them.

We are given glimpses of glory in our lives,
We are given glimpses of glory not to remain there, not to stay on the mountaintop
But to prepare us and to encourage us to seek to know Jesus
And to follow where He leads
To know and to make Christ known by the quality of our lives,
So that others may be given glimpses of God's glory through us.

And so I invite you to take some time this week and over this coming season of Lent
To recall and to reflect on the great and transfiguring moments of your life;
To remember when God was most surely present with you;
When you were changed and made ready for your life.

I invite you, too, to spend more time with God each day
So that you can know the love and power and grace that God intends for you and me;
So that you may be fed and changed by the hand of God
To move on, renewed, encouraged and empowered
From those moments for life and for ministry.

You and I will be given more glimpses of glory to encourage us along the way
And others will glimpse God's glory through the light we carry
And one day, whether it's a short time or a long time,
You will know God's glory and grace and love in all its fullness
As you enter into the everlasting glory in heaven;
And the fuller presence of God.

Amen.