

“Resurrection Foreshadowed”
Mark 9:2-9
Sunday, February 11, 2018
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

For some folks, going to church is a mountaintop experience; they look forward to seeing Christ like the disciples saw him on the mount of transfiguration. For other folks, church is a duty; they go because they feel they should. For still other folks, church is an option, of which they only avail themselves at Christmas and Easter. “CEO’s” we call them – Christmas and Easter Only’s.

A young woman asked her older co-worker: “Why do you go to church every Sunday? Does something happen there that can’t happen somewhere else? And does it happen every Sunday?”

The older woman replied, “What happens is I go to meet the God whom I’ve come to know in Jesus. God meets me in other settings than at church. However, I must confess that I’m sure I miss most of God’s appointments with me. I find that I live most of my days in a daze – as though I’m sleepwalking or on autopilot. I go to church to be reminded that that’s true.”

The younger woman then asked, “So you go to church every week and God meets you there?”

The older woman answered, “I go to church every Sunday, and for reasons I can’t explain, I meet God about 1 in every 8 worship services.”

The younger woman asked, “Then why do you go every Sunday?”

“I go every Sunday,” said the older woman, “because I never know when that one Sunday is going to be” (source: Mike Ripski).

Worship can be a mountaintop where we meet God, where we encounter God's glory in profound, even miraculous ways. Some folks have experienced the miracle of Christ's transfiguration glory, be it in worship or in other settings. I'd like to share with you, this morning, the beautiful language that a few of these miracle-believers have used to describe their experiences on the mountaintop. Jesus' transfiguration is wrapped in mystery. Like the disciples, we cannot fully comprehend this foreshadowing of the resurrection. That doesn't mean it isn't real.

I. "Fog-clearing."

Joe Pennel, Jr. uses a wonderful term for the mountaintop. He calls it "fog-clearing." He writes:

"Most of us have had fog-clearing moments. A recent Gallop Poll reported that eighty-five percent of the people interviewed said that they had had a 'mystical' experience with God. This is a high percentage! But, when you think about it, there have been those moments in life when we experienced God's presence and purpose in ways that are deep, profound, and real. So great is that certainty that we would stake our lives upon its reality. Perhaps we cannot explain it, but it is real beyond the shadow of a doubt."

A fog-clearing experience could be as simple as gazing up at the stars and being struck by how vast and amazing God's handiwork is. Or it could be as profound as a true mystical experience of God's physical presence in the form of light or sound or wind or healing.

There's a story about a church that chose as its Lenten theme, "Forty Days of Love." Each week members of the congregation were encouraged to show their love and appreciation in different ways. The first week they were encouraged to send notes to people who had made positive contributions to their lives.

After the first service a man in the congregation wanted to speak to his pastor. The pastor describes the man as “kind of macho, a former football player who loved to hunt and fish, a strong self-made man.” The man told his pastor, “I love you and I love this church, but I'm not going to participate in this Forty Days of Love stuff. It's OK for some folks,” he said, “but it's a little too sentimental and syrupy for me.”

A week went by. The next Sunday this man waited after church to see his pastor again. “I want to apologize for what I said last Sunday,” he told him, “about the Forty Days of Love. I realized on Wednesday that I was wrong.”

“Wednesday?” his pastor repeated. “What happened on Wednesday?”

“I got one of those letters!” the man said. The letter came as a total surprise. It was from a person the man never expected to hear from. It touched him so deeply he now carries it around in his pocket all the time. “Every time I read it,” he said, “I get tears in my eyes.” It was a transforming moment in this man's life. Suddenly he realized he was loved by others in the church. This changed his entire outlook. “I was so moved by that letter,” he said, “I sat down and wrote ten letters myself” (source: King Duncan).

That man had a fog-clearing moment. Through someone's simple act of sending a positive, love-filled letter to him, that man was transported to the mountaintop. He experienced the dazzling glory of Jesus' transforming love.

We never know how, when, or where that glory will strike us. We never know when the fog will clear and the truth of Jesus will terrify us and comfort us, all at once.

II. “The really really Real.”

Marilyn McCord Adams uses another great phrase to describe the mountaintop. She calls it an encounter with “the really really Real.” I love that phrase! “The really really Real.”

Doesn't that describe Jesus perfectly? He's really, really Real. Maybe I'm too '60's, I donno.

Adams writes that our “[human] wineskins [are] too brittle and inelastic to contain the bubbling creativity of the really, really Real...” and she suggests that “Jesus recognizes... disciples... who have the courage to march open eyed into the terra incognita of Jesus' glory, to get sucked into the vortex of the really Real Kingdom coming, so as never to come out on the other side.”

“Even on all kinds of days when the disciples and Jesus were by no means having a mountaintop experience and when dazzling garments whiter than white were nowhere to be seen, even then when Jesus smiled kindly at lepers, looked pained to see a ‘sinner’ being shunned by the Temple establishment, or looked winsome after telling a hurting prostitute to go in peace because her sins were forgiven, there was a sense in which the disciples were seeing the face of the divine transfigured also in those ordinary moments. They were seeing hints of glory. They were seeing true God of true God, vividly and surprisingly and, yes, dazzlingly on display in God's One and Only Son, full of grace and truth.” (Scott Hoezee).

The really Real Kingdom of God is present on the mountaintop, and it is present in the valley. God's glory is here, shining on us in this place of worship this morning. That same glory is available to us in the office on Monday, in the farm field on Wednesday, or in the bar on Friday night. We close our eyes; God's light is too blinding for us. We turn away; the intensity of Jesus' love for us is more than we can bear. We allow the fog to fill our minds and our lives; the really, really Real of Christ is too real for us; we prefer the fake, tarnished lives we so often choose instead.

Like the disciples, we often fear life more than death. We fear the resurrection more than the cross. We may be ready to suffer, even die for Christ; we are reluctant to live for him.

III. “Joyous ecstasy.”

Germaine Copeland tells a story of being deep in a personal valley and finding resurrection hope. Copeland is the author of the “Prayers That Avail Much” book series, which has sold over 3 million copies. She began her faith journey 31 years ago when she was a homemaker on the verge of taking her own life.

“I had a problem with depression and had come to the place where I didn't want to live,” recalls Copeland. As she was sitting at her kitchen table, a light flooded the room and she knew that it was God.

“My yellow kitchen became a yellow I'd never seen before. The grass outside was a green I'd never seen before,” said Copeland. “It was as though old things passed away and all things became new. I didn't want that time to be over, but when it was, I was left with this joyous ecstasy” (source: Candice Hannigan, for the Journal-Constitution, Atlanta).

Copeland’s phrase, “joyous ecstasy,” is a phrase that is often used by mystics and spiritual seekers throughout Christian history. The mountaintop state of ecstasy is not something that can be sustained in day to day living. At the same time, that experience of spiritual ecstasy changes us. Copeland’s unique encounter with Jesus changed her life. She dove into the Bible with a new hunger to learn. She invited friends to join her, and over time folks would ask her to pray for them, sensing that she had been touched by God in a special way. Her books became a tangible expression of the joyous ecstasy she had experienced.

When Peter, James and John see Jesus transfigured on the mountaintop, they do not understand what it all means. They can’t see how it will all play out. When Copeland is blinded by the light in her kitchen, she doesn’t know what that moment will mean for her future.

You and I may not see dazzling light in our kitchens. But maybe we will. Maybe some

of us have. To have those experiences of God, and to treasure them, is enough. We don't have to know what it all means. We don't have to comprehend all the mysteries of God in order to accept what he brings to us each day – the opportunity for some fog-clearing; the chance to participate in the really really Real of His Kingdom; the possibility of joyous ecstasy, here in the valley of our lives. Because we know the creator of the universe. He's our friend. He's our Lord and Savior. He's our Daddy.

Closing.

We had a one-day retreat my first year at this church. Friends from Camps Farthest Out organized a mountaintop day for our church and community.

Len Marinello is one of the CFO leaders; he shares a great image I'd like to pass on to you. Len has a young granddaughter; I think at the time she was 2 yrs. old, or thereabouts. She was at an age where she'd always be raising up her arms to Grampa Len, crying, "Pick me up! Pick me up!"

When you are in a valley of depression, like Germaine Copeland once was...when you feel far from the really really Real, captured by the fake traps of this world...when you feel like you are disappearing in a fog of despair and confusion... Here's what you do. Cry out to God: "Pick me up! Pick me up!" He is our Father. Jesus called him Abba, which means Papa, or Daddy. We can run to him with outstretched arms, like Len's little 2-yr.-old granddaughter.

The glory of the mountaintop is only ever as far away as our glorious God. He is here with us in the valley. He comes down off the mountain to be with us, whatever our situation. He does not abandon us to the valley alone. Reach out to Him; He is reaching out to you.

Amen.