

Karen Hollis
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Matthew 17:1-9
The Transfiguration

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus we pray, Amen.

Lift voice

I was driving home from the church and just as I was about to turn on Peterson I began looking left and in the sky was one of those high, thin clouds that blanket portions of the sky. The cloud shone in the late afternoon sun and stood out against the blue background. It caught my attention and I immediately thought of the Holy Spirit coming down as a dove. I looked back at the road to make my turn, and glanced up again at the cloud. The image of the Holy Spirit came to me again, as if God was saying, this is the Holy Spirit coming down for you. I pushed back, thinking yeah well, it's not really dove shaped. But the thought came again: this IS the Holy Spirit. So I said thank you and drove home a little lighter.

One of my favourite topics for group sharing is mountaintop experiences: stories of

personal encounter with the holy. I love sharing stories of experiences we can't explain. Stories of connections made at precisely the right time. I love hearing and sharing them because it normalizes our human experience; it's normal to have these experiences and it's normal to not have them. In this culture so dominated by rational thought, we are not sure where the safe places are to share experiences that don't seem to make sense; if I tell someone, they will think I'm weird or crazy. Am I the only one who has these experiences or is there something wrong with me? Or, did that really happen? I wonder if I experienced anything at all. Coming back down off the mountain, re-entering the ordinary world, we might wonder if we've been dreaming. But I wonder, if it were a dream, would the encounter be any less real?

"CS Lewis writes a final word from Aslan in *The Silver Chair*: 'Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the

signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearance. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters.”¹

Sometimes we have clarity in a holy encounter, like the disciples’ mountaintop experience. Other times it is not so clear to us. Mountaintops are ideal places to encounter God as CS Lewis says, because we’re not so distracted with the daily stuff of life. We’re able to slow down, breathe in, and see beyond what our eyes can perceive . . . see what our faith can perceive. As our faith grows, so can our perceiving . . . it’s a muscle and a skill like any other that gets stronger with practice and intention.

Sometimes years later we “remember conversations, encounters, and events that puzzled [us] at the time, but which now, in the light of all that has happened in the intervening years, [we] perceive with eyes of faith. The ordinary, in remembrance, takes on

extraordinary significance.”² Because making meaning takes time and reflection . . . in our remembering, where we are able to see past the FORM of an encounter . . . to the essence.

I imagine the shock of whatever the disciples experienced on the mountaintop. I wonder how they perceived the brightness of the cloud . . . what did they look like, the figures of Moses and Elijah? I wonder how they perceived a voice of God, whether it was auditory or otherwise, and got a sense of Jesus’ own shining face. I wonder what they did with that memory. I wonder how that memory worked in them, if it was a living memory of the presence of God that they could draw on for comfort as they followed Jesus toward the cross. I wonder if it affirmed for them their decision to follow him in the first place.

And what does the story do for us? One the one hand I think it normalizes the experience of God breaking into our lives in weird and wonderful ways . . . to speak to us words of comfort, challenge, direction. The words God communicates in the bright cloud struck me,

¹ FOW 454.

² FOW Year A Vol 1, p. 454.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” It’s an echo of what God communicates in Jesus’ baptism . . . (pause) but do you hear what God is communicating here? Jesus is holy, Jesus is blessed, and Jesus has a teaching that is worth learning. You may resonate with one or all of those statements; we celebrate here a diversity of understandings of who Jesus is: holy, blessed, teacher . . . but either way it’s a gift to see him and know him. Perhaps these words are a reminder that if you stick with Jesus, he will help and guide you in the ways you need . . . through the wisdom of his teaching, through his holy presence; he is with us and we are not alone.

The season of Lent begins in 3 days. The Transfiguration is always a little foreshadowing of the resurrection to come right before we step into Lent. On this Transfiguration Sunday God’s light shines around us and in the person of Jesus, reminding us the holy accompanies us along the way. Even when we cannot perceive the holy, God is still with us.

God is with us as we enter the season of Lent. This season has a reputation for being

daunting, even scary. I would encourage us all not to allow strict rules you’ve heard about lent deter you from engaging in the season. You don’t have to give up something you love just to experience deprivation.

The intent is to be where you are in your faith journey . . . notice where you are and maybe see if there is something identifiable between you and God, distracting you from your relationship with God (something like TV, being busy, sugar), that you can set aside for the season. Without the impediment of whatever the thing is, see what changes for you, maybe lean into your relationship with God in some way. Lent can be long, it can be daunting, and life-giving. If you want some help finding YOUR way of doing lent this year, you’re welcome to come and talk with me. And know that God is with you every step of the way. Thanks be to God!