

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
February 11, 2018  
Transfiguration  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Exodus 34:28-35  
Psalm 99  
2 Peter 1:16-21  
Mark 9:2-9

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, the season that started with Jesus' baptism and now ends with the Transfiguration.

What do these two stories have in common? In both of them there is an announcement from God that Jesus is God's beloved Son. Both scenes are *epiphanies*, because they are "revelations" from God. They are encounters where God is revealed in a special way.

As such, these scenes are glimpses of heaven. The scene in our Gospel lesson today represents an event where heaven breaks through to verify not only the holiness of Jesus, but the care and presence of God in *our* lives and in the life of the world.

What an experience this must have been for Peter, James and John. It is hard to overstate its impact on them. This was definitely a glimpse into heaven for them. It was a word from God. This experience would forever change their outlook on the world. No doubt they would draw on this experience for years to come. This seems apparent from our epistle lesson for today.

I believe all of us need these kind of mountain top experiences. We need times in our lives when we know with certainty that God is with us. Times when we see clearly the glory and majesty of God.

In looking at this Gospel story, and the experiences of Moses and Elijah who appear with Jesus on the mountain, I've concluded that epiphanies have at least two basic characteristics: *They draw us closer to God, and they give us strength for our journey.*

Consider Moses. We remember him as he climbed Mt. Sinai to receive his commission from God. Then later he climbs the mountain again where God reveals the Ten Commandments to him.

Do you remember Moses' face as he came down from the mountain? Remember how Moses' face was so radiant with the glory of God that the people couldn't look at him? His face was dazzling and radiant, and the people knew he had been in the presence of God.

What a great leader Moses became after that experience. The mountain top experience lasted only briefly, but it strengthened Moses to come down and to do the work God had given him to do, leading the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

And consider Elijah, the great prophet. He had a mountain top experience as well, defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Following that, he finds

himself running for his life, running eventually all the way to Mt. Sinai (what a coincidence!).

And there, on the mountain, God speaks to him again -- not in the fire or the earthquake or the storm, but in the still, small voice. And this mountain top experience not only draws Elijah closer to God, but it gives him strength for his remaining journey. For Elijah had to come down from the mountain in order to continue his work as prophet and leader of the Hebrew people.

Mountain top experiences are great. We need them. They draw us closer to God and they give us strength for the journey that lies ahead.

And while the mountain top experiences for Moses and Elijah were great and awesome, they did not last long. Both Elijah and Moses had to come down from the mountain in order to finish the work God had given them to do.

And as it was with Moses and Elijah, so it is with Jesus. This mountain top experience is definitely an epiphany, a revelation of who Jesus is. He is the beloved Son of God. He is the eternal brightness of the Father's face. He is Light from Light, true God from true God.

Now I understand that Jesus was the divine Son of God, and so his experience may not exactly parallel that of Moses and Elijah. But I wonder if there isn't a sense in which Jesus experienced here what Moses and Elijah each experienced during their mountain top experiences.

That is, I'd like to think that as they are all on the mountain here, Jesus himself draws closer to God, and receives strength from the Father for the road that lies ahead of *him*. For remember, not only is Jesus truly God, he is also truly human. Very God and very man. Born of a woman. Soon to suffer under Pontius Pilate. This God-man is about to embark on a journey where he will pick up and carry the sins of the whole world on his shoulders.

And guess what? Jesus invites us to go along with him. As the season of Lent begins this week, we will be invited to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him to Jerusalem. We are invited into a mysterious process of discovery where we learn that true and abundant life is found through sacrifice and service to others. We are invited to discover that only in giving yourself away do you find the true meaning of life.

Now, how do we prepare for such a journey? Wouldn't it be great if we could have a mountain top experience, an epiphany, an experience where we could get a glimpse of heaven? An experience where we could draw closer to God, and where we could receive strength for this journey.

We could perhaps all go up to Bogus Basin or some other nearby mountain, and see what happens.

But I have a better idea. We don't need to go and climb a mountain. For our place of transfiguration is already here, waiting for us. And it requires only that we take a few steps.

Can you guess where I'm going? I'm speaking here of the Lord's Table. For it occurred to me this week that the Eucharist provides the very things that all good epiphanies provide: it draws us closer to God, and it strengthens us for the journey that yet lies ahead.

When we come to the Table of the Lord, we get a glimpse of heaven. In the bread and wine, we encounter the living God, who speaks to us and tells us we are loved and forgiven. At the Lord's Table, we know that God is with us.

And in the Eucharist we are strengthened for our journey. We receive grace that helps us in time of need, or for those times when the way gets rough or when we might be tempted to falter and give up.

The Lord's Table, then, is a transforming and transfiguring experience for us. It draws us near to God, and strengthens us for our life of continued obedience in the Spirit. And from this Table we then rise and go forth ready to meet whatever awaits us with faith and confidence.

So come with faith and thanksgiving. Come and draw near to God, and receive strength for the journey which lies ahead of us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.