

Transfiguration
“Out of the Ordinary”
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Texts: Exodus 24:12-18
Matthew 17:1-9

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[IMAGE – dreary window]

When we’re in the regular, ordinary patterns of our life, it is easy to fall into a dull rhythm, where nothing special happens, and we begin to believe that nothing special can happen. God seems far off. Our souls are parched. We forget who we are and whose we are. This is the season for such feelings.

[IMAGE – lonely walk]

As the song goes... “All the leaves are brown, and the skies are gray.” Although we have been blessed with several sunny days lately. I’ve tried to take it in. What about you? Still, this may be a dreary time for you. It’s like going for a walk on a winter’s day. The breeze is colder than you would like. The street is lonely, no one is out. You better get back home and run the vacuum, clean the bathroom or fix that leaky faucet!

[IMAGE – nothing will happen quote]

Maybe the cure for such drudgery is getting “out of the ordinary.” Sometimes we can choose an adventure to do that. Maybe you can travel to a new place, take a trip to somewhere warm or exotic or utterly different than what is familiar. Other times we may stumble into newness, or get thrust into it by unexpected circumstances. Even if the new thing is unwanted, it might get you out of your rut.

[IMAGE – limited vision sign]

Disorientation, an unfamiliar location, limited vision and perhaps even fatigue from the climb up some mountain might just break down our normal perceptions and obliviousness enough to open us to the voice of God and the instructions that come with it.

[IMAGE – Shining Mountain]

Moses is called up the mountain and instructed to wait. He is eventually enveloped in the cloud, away from his routine and community for 40 days and nights. But Moses was encompassed with

the glory of the LORD. And it would be on that mountain that he received the Ten Commandments

[IMAGE – Cover-Transfiguration]

Peter, James and John are led up a high mountain by themselves, Jesus their only guide. We sense something big, other worldly, pivotal is about to happen and in order to perceive it, even partially, ordinary human beings need to be jolted out of their comfort. That happens several times over, beginning with Jesus' blinding face shine and his dazzling threads! There is another cloud, reminiscent of Moses, and God's own voice attesting to Jesus, his beloved Son.

[IMAGE – long curved path]

Where is Jesus leading us, apart and away from our normal places and tasks? How will you find your way out of the regular and the commonplace? What is your mountain? Maybe it is not a physical climb up an actual mountain, but perhaps a metaphorical clearing of mental space where we could be intentionally open to God's Word. What uncomfortable, unfamiliar territory are we being called to traverse in order to hear the voice of God, recognize Jesus' presence and reorient our lives to better reflect God's instructions? Maybe we have already seen...heard the voice. Will we listen?

[IMAGE – Childcare Center]

Of course, we are being called here at East Union, out of our comfort zones, to embark on a significant new project...our new Childcare Center. It's something that will surely stretch us, challenge us, unsettle us, but may very well expose us to the glory of God in our midst. Through such a project, such a bold endeavor, such a risk, we may very well grow in ways we never could have before!

[IMAGE – sitting on a rock]

What if we could let go of what is comfortable and familiar and regular and ordinary? What if we imagined heading where Jesus told us to go, apart, by ourselves? What if we remained awake enough, open enough, alert enough, uncomfortable enough, to be overwhelmed with the power of God, laid bare by God's word, rightly terrified by God's glory in the face of our failings and misunderstandings? Could our assumptions be transfigured right along with Jesus?

[IMAGE – Amazed Disciples]

If we don't find ourselves periodically flattened by the glory and presence of the Most High God, maybe we need to take stock of our spiritual lives. Maybe we need to somehow bust ourselves out of the ordinary and follow Jesus up the mountain. Maybe, when we look around, we'll find ourselves hunkered down in the valleys of our own contentment. And while Jesus' yoke is easy

and his burden is light, his call is not to comfort, but rather to redemption and reconciliation by way of the cross.

[IMAGE – What-is-the-glory-of-God]

Sometimes busting out of the ordinary might not involve a journey at all, the mountain to climb is rather a new perspective, a recovered confidence, or an adjusted assessment. Yet it's hard to imagine experiencing the glory of God, something dazzling, arresting, humbling. However, we should not think that divine glory is other-worldly, totally separate from what we know and who we are.

[IMAGE – Henri Nouwen]

The late Henri Nouwen wrote of a conversation he shared with the Abbot of a Trappist monastery...They were talking about the barriers to true worship. How do you dispel the passions that make us manipulate instead of worship? Nouwen asked...Well, said the Abbot, the first thing to realize is that you *are* the glory of God. In Genesis you can read: "God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). We live because we share God's breath, God's glory. The question is not so much, "How to live for the glory of God?" but, "How to live who we are, how to make true our deepest self?"

[ILLUSTRATION – Genesee Diary]

With a smile the abbot said, "Take this as your koan: 'I am the glory of God.' Make that thought the center of your meditation so that it slowly becomes not only a thought but a living reality. You are the place where God chose to dwell, you are [God's dwelling place] and the spiritual life is nothing more or less than to allow that space to exist where God can dwell, to create the space where his glory can manifest itself. In your meditation you can ask your self, "Where is the glory of God? If the glory of God is not there where I am, where else can it be?"

[IMAGE – help mountain climbing]

Know that Jesus invites us to follow him – that means away from the ordinary routines of our regular lives. There may be some treacherous terrain...after all, these are mountains. There is a daunting climb that must be made by all of us, if we are ever going to hear and heed Jesus' instruction...the commandment to love one another, to feed the hungry, to pray for our enemies, to forgive as we have been forgiven.

[IMAGE – do not fear]

The temptation to remain where we are or to hunker down apart when we reach the summit is almost irresistibly strong. The presence of God, holy space is unsettling. God's voice can be

terrifying. We could hardly stand to witness transfiguration or submit to the transformation it requires of us on our own. But we are not alone on the mountain. We would surely be paralyzed if it weren't for the touch and assurance of Jesus, who says to us, over and over again, "Get up and do not be afraid."

[IMAGE – jesus-disciples]

Let us follow Jesus up whatever mountain he leads us, even knowing the journey will be challenging, taking us far out of our comfort zones...yet trusting that the glory of God is not far from us. Perhaps getting out of the ordinary means allowing the power of God to knock you off your feet so that Jesus can help you up again. Let us listen to him, as the voice said, and then we can head back down the mountain, ready to share the story and live the glory.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.