

Mark 9:2-9

Epiphany is about light, about illumination, and about revelation. Today's gospel lesson brings the Epiphany season to a close. We have followed Jesus from his baptism through his early public ministry to the Transfiguration, which gives us this final glimpse of who Jesus is. The Transfiguration of Jesus, found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, is perhaps the definitive "mountain top experience." Here, on top of a mountain, Peter, James and John are presented with Jesus' credentials, the glory of God's holy, anointed One.

Jesus ascends a mountain where his human appearance is transfigured (Gr., metamorphosed) into the glory that belonged to God the Son from the beginning. In this account from Mark's Gospel, Jesus is filled with the radiance of God's presence, with his clothes becoming "dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." But where Elijah left his assistant Elisha on the banks of the River Jordan and ascended into heaven in a whirlwind of a "chariot and horses of fire," here Peter, James and John accompany Jesus and witness his glory revealed on a mountain top.

And with him on the mountain top are Moses the lawgiver and Elijah, the most prominent of the Hebrew prophets. Just six days after Peter recognizes Jesus as the "Messiah, the Son of the living God", Jesus takes Peter, James and John to witness a vision that will sustain them through the dark days ahead in Jerusalem. Indeed, a vision that will sustain them the rest of their lives.

Think about what the disciples have just witnessed. Jesus invited them to walk with him up a nearby mountain. They were used to going with him as he went to quiet places to rest and pray. So this started out as just a normal walk for them. Everything seemed ordinary, except God had something extraordinary planned. As they got to the top of the mountain, a change came over Jesus. In a dazzling flash, they saw Jesus shining in blazing light, radiant with the light-energy of God's presence. Jesus was more than the man they saw every day.

While the disciples didn't move directly into believing that Jesus was the Divine Logos or the Second Person of the Trinity, they could no longer see him as just a gifted carpenter and preacher from Nazareth. Jesus then commands them not to speak of this event until after he has been raised from the dead. There is something about this event that can't be understood until after the resurrection.

What happened on the Mount of Transfiguration we can never fully know, but we do know that something extraordinary did happen. Perhaps Jesus had gone there to seek God's guidance for the decisive steps he was about to take. There

Moses and Elijah appeared to him. It was as if the princes of Israel's life and religion were encouraging him to go on to Jerusalem and the cross that awaited him there. The Transfiguration was also meant for the three disciples who accompanied Jesus that day. These men would go on to lead the church in Jerusalem.

Now it's wonderful to be blessed with mountain-top experiences. But, honestly, aren't most of our lives spent in the valleys? Notice that Jesus didn't let any of the disciples stay on that mountain top clinging to their vision of God's radiant presence. Jesus led the disciples down the mountain that day and back into the world filled with people with real needs and real suffering, where they would discover their God-given purpose and mission.

And just like he did with Peter, James and John – Jesus tells us to get up and not be afraid as he walks with us from the mountain tops through the valleys of our lives. Jesus wants to take us down from the mountain tops and into the valleys of our homes, our neighborhoods and workplaces, where he will help us see and hear the heartaches and needs of others. And when we stumble and fall, when we are overwhelmed by fear, frustration and grief, we can hear his voice as he reaches out to lift us up, "Get up, do not be afraid."

Jesus invites us to join with him by opening ourselves to God's grace and allowing the healing and transforming power of God's love to flow through us to the people in our lives. God is engaged in mission all around us and Christ is eager for us to join in God's mission to the world, giving ourselves to being good neighbors, joining with Jesus in the healing and redemptive work of forgiveness and reconciliation.

And so the Transfiguration encourages us at this point in the Church year, just before we enter Lent, to remember Christ's glory. We will need this reminder, just as the disciples did, as we take up our cross on the way to Easter. Are you listening? Can you hear Jesus calling? "Get up. Don't be afraid. Come – follow me!"

**Resources:** Synthesis, 2015, 2018; William Barclay, 1975; David Lose, 2015, 2018.