

The Last Sunday in Epiphany, March 2, 2025  
St. Michael's Church, The Reverend Joshua Wong

The Gospel: Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)

In our Gospel reading today, we heard what is known as The Transfiguration story. Peter, James and John were invited by Jesus to go to the mountain to pray. There, Jesus was transfigured before their eyes and became dazzling white. Suddenly, joining them were Elijah and Moses. Just as Elijah and Moses were about to leave Jesus, Peter said to Him, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

We can't blame Peter for his emotionally charged moment. Their mountaintop experience was life-changing.

But, our mountaintop experiences with Jesus are not meant to stay at the mountaintop. As we can see in the Transfiguration story, Peter's fervor was commendable, but it was not Jesus' will. Peter tried to contain, domesticate, protect, and possess the sublime moment. He tried to harness the holy to make the fleeting moment permanent. We sometimes do the same in the church. We say, "Do you remember the good old days when more people use to come to church?" But Jesus' mission here on earth required him to face reality, and come down into

the valley where people really lived and where people were broken. Jesus came to earth not to be secluded and protected with the Godly, but to be with the pains of the people waiting in the valley. Jesus now asks us to come down to the valley and serve in a church and in a society that is changing.

There are many insights we can gather from this story, but one thing stands out clearly. God is just as present, active, engaged, and glorious down in the valley as He is in the visions of saints, clouds, and shadows. In fact, what Peter eventually learns is that the compassionate heart of God is most powerfully revealed amidst the broken, the sinful, the suffering, and the despairing. The kingdom of God shines most brightly against the backdrop of the parent who grieves, the autistic innocent child who tries to navigate the world, “demons” who oppress those with addiction issues, and even the disciples who try but fail to manufacture the holy. God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness. God’s beauty is best contained in broken vessels. We might not like this aspect of faith, we might want our faith to be contained in a simple, manageable bubble, but that’s not God’s intention. You see, brokenness has much to teach us.

To me, it’s interesting — and sobering — to notice that the Transfiguration doesn’t grant Jesus’s disciples the faith or the strength to heal the suffering boy, or comfort his heartbroken father. What they experience during their spiritual high doesn’t

magically translate into vibrant, transformative faith down below. Which is to say, if we, or our church is waiting for mountaintop experiences to mature and deepen our faith before we love and serve God's children in the valley, then we need to realize that God doesn't work that way. The discipline of the valley happens in the valley. Finding God in the ordinary requires dwelling in the ordinary. We learn daily holiness only in our "regular" lives. There are no shortcuts to growing up in Christ. God is not in the business of offering us permanent tents on the mountaintops. But God has promised to be present when we follow him in his direction.

So here's the great challenge of the Christian life: can we speak glory to agony, and agony to glory? Can we hold the mountain and the valley as one — denying neither, and embracing both? Can we glorify God in the sublime, and in despair?

Mountaintop experiences are any moments that you sense the presence of God, any moments during your journey in your life. It could be a spiritual issue you may be working through with the Lord, or, it may be creative where God is equally present in revealing an epiphany to you, like a moment in the choir when there seems to be a sense of bliss and unity when every note and word comes together. For me, it's that moment in Holy Communion when we sing, "Taste and See." Or, it may be moments when in your sorrow you feel the warmth of God's presence assuring you

of your belovedness. Mountaintop experiences can also literally be those moments in nature when you sense the awesomeness of creation. All these are spiritual moments that we savor and wish would last forever, but it is meant to lead us down to the valley where we come to the aching world, where our message of God's love effects the world.

If we ask yourself why we don't have many mountaintop experiences? Could it be that our lives are too busy for them, or maybe we are not open to them.

Mountaintop experiences are blessings from God because they give us an experience that can be passed on to others. For Peter, James and John, their experience gave them stronger faith to be disciples.

I still yearn for mountaintop experiences, and that's okay. Be assured, mountaintop experiences will come and go according to God's timing, not according to my micromanagement. They will come in many forms. What's essential is finding Jesus on the long road. In the magnificent and in deep sorrow. And at the heart of the unanswered prayers. What's key is discerning the presence of God in those "in-between" spaces of life, the spaces between the light and the shadow. Those uneasy places where our faith is challenged, and in the unclear answers.

With Transfiguration Sunday, we come to the end of another liturgical season. Having seen the brightness of Epiphany, we prepare now for the holy darkness of Lent. We can't know ahead of time what mountains and valleys lie ahead. We can't predict how God will speak, and in what manner Jesus might appear. And that's absolutely OK. But we can trust in this: whether on the brightest mountain, or in the darkest valley, Jesus promises to abide with us. Even when everything else we're counting on disappears, Jesus promises to remain among us — his presence remains faithful guiding us and our church along.

So if you want to stay in your safe spiritual bubble on the mountaintop, don't be afraid to come down from there. Don't be afraid to live life along side God's plans for your life or the church's life. Risk having faith with God, allowing Him to transform your life or our church's life. Be a part of change. Keep looking and listening for the sacred, no matter where the journey takes you. Because Jesus is present everywhere. Both the mountain and the valley belong to him. Remember that He is Lord of all. Amen.