

Matthew 17:1-9

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

God of light, make us attentive to your Word as to a lamp shining in a dark place, that seeing your truth we may live faithful lives until that great day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. Amen.

Jesus brought Peter, James and John up a high mountain. This is an immediate clue that we are about to hear a story about an encounter with God. The Gospels suggest that Jesus made it a habit to go into the mountains to pray; to be in conversation with God. In this story Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus. They also had conversations with God: Moses, the Law giver, spoke to God on Mt. Sinai; Elijah, the consummate prophet, heard God’s *still small voice* on Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:11ff).

Mountains are a place of holy revelation; intimacy with God. Heading up the mountain, Peter, James and John probably had no idea they were about to experience a spiritual revelation that would blown them away. Let’s put ourselves in their sandals and try to imagine what they saw and felt.

Jesus became transfigured, his face shining like the sun. Ever try to look at the sun? We can’t! It would have been the same 2000 years ago. And his clothes became dazzling white. There’s no explaining how this could be. Then they saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus. There’s no explaining that either! So what’s going on? Matthew is describing, I believe, an ecstatic experience; Peter, James and John were enveloped in a holy revelation in light.

It was an experience of spiritual ecstasy, a revelation of God’s presence which put Jesus at the center, overflowing with the light of God (this was no earthly light); it was a vision suggesting that Jesus was the complete, or perfect, fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah).

This ecstatic experience was not only visual, but auditory as well. A bright cloud suddenly overshadowed them and a voice spoke from the cloud saying, *This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!* Could an encounter with God get more intimate than this? Or more intense?

Matthew had pulled out all the stops for his Jewish audience: Matthew’s reference to *6 days later* recalls another cloud, this time covering Mt. Sinai for 6 days before Moses went up to receive the 10 Commandments. In addition, when Moses came down his face shown because he had been talking with God; he had to wear a veil on his face so he wouldn’t scare the people.

God sent Moses to free the people from physical captivity; Jesus came from God to free the people from spiritual captivity by showing them that the Law was not meant to bind them, but set them free to know true intimacy with God. God desires that we know the *ecstasy* of God’s real presence. How is this possible?

First I think we have to believe that we are all hooked up to God’s high voltage, but for some reason we’ve forgotten how to turn on the circuit breakers. Let me share a passage from *A Return to Love*, by Marianne Williamson.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. **We are all meant to shine, as children do.** We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in **everyone**. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

We are all meant to shine, but the way of the world and its greed and lust for power, its addiction to material gain and the accumulation of things, actually brings us down, and robs us of the freedom to be the people God calls us to be. We are misled by the race for the top. And the poor who are left behind are ignored, victimized, and criminalized.

God did not make us for this culture which is obsessed with material gain and believes that the one who dies with the most toys, wins. Who knowingly would attach their soul to lifeless objects that rust and decay? We were made to know the ecstasy of life in God. We need to get back in touch with the mystic saints who know our true vocation in God.

Here's a poem from St. Francis of Assisi that suggests he may have experienced something like Jesus' transfiguration:

WRING OUT MY CLOTHES

*Such love does the sky now pour,
that whenever I stand in a field,
I have to wring out the light
when I get home.*

I believe St. Francis was describing an experience of ecstasy. We should not be strangers to ecstasy. Many runners experience a high when running; climbing mountains has brought me many experiences of great joy that I would call ecstatic experiences; meditation can lead to ecstasy; and sex!

Here's another poem from St. Francis:

THE SACRAMENTS

*I once spoke to my friend, an old squirrel, about the Sacraments –
he got so excited
and ran into a hollow in his tree and came back holding
some acorns, an owl feather, and a ribbon he had found.
And I smiled and said, “Yes dear, you understand:
Everything imparts His grace.”*

God speaks to us in the simplest things. Mike Gecan, the author of *Going Public* told about going to his child's Kindergarten class and seeing a bulletin board illustrating what the children wanted to learn

in school that year. Most of the statements were like; “behave,” “learn to sit still,” “follow the rules,” “listen to the teacher better.” One child said, “I want to know why the ocean shines like fire.”

Holy Smoke!!! Here's a kid who is turned on to the light! Here's a kid who has the gift of joy and wonder at what he sees around him. He may be too young to believe this creation is God's gift to all of us, overflowing as it is with wonder and gifts of joy and ecstasy, but there's no question that he can see it and feel it!

So I want to say that we can all turn on the circuit breakers and let God's high voltage flow through us. We can all be transfigured; burst open with the light of God, as a gift to push back the dark places where life is stifled and suppressed and suffocated. If we let our light shine it will encourage others to do the same, just like passing on a smile to a stranger at the supermarket.

Can we imagine Jesus touching us and saying, “rise up, do not be afraid.” His light is in us. So let us look upon the world with compassion, and let the light shine through.

Holy God, for the gift of your light in Jesus Christ, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.