

Luke 9:28-45

When the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh's hand, and were wandering in the wilderness, God's Presence stayed with them in a visible way: a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. When they became scared, hungry, thirsty, and needed to find God — all they needed to do was look to the cloud. When Moses climbed Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, a cloud descended upon the mountain, obscuring it. When the people looked up, they could no longer see Moses.

When God instructed the Israelites to construct a portable Tabernacle, God filled the tent with his Presence in the form of a cloud. And, later, when Solomon built the Temple, once again a cloud filled the sanctuary. So, when the cloud descends atop the mountain with Jesus, Peter, John and James ... we shouldn't be surprised.

The Presence of God is enveloping them, as the Presence of God has done time and time again to God's faithful people. God's Presence manifest as a cloud says something about God. The clouds don't bring more clarity, they obscure. They hide. And, in this sense they remind us of the mystery of God.

In our world we want to know things. We want Google always at our fingertips to tell us everything about anything, and we want Facebook to instantly tell us everything else — what our friends had for dinner, how their vacation is going, what cute thing their pet or child has done. As humans we've always had a hunger and thirst for knowledge — ever since Eden. And, as technology advanced through the millennia, we want more and more knowledge within our grasp at all times.

For the faithful, that includes our relationship with God. We want to know things about God. We want to know how to relate to God. We want to know how this story, or this proverb, or this anecdote applies to our life. Tangibly. Meaningfully. And, why wait? We'd like to know right now, please. But, a relationship with God isn't so easy. God isn't composed of a series of facts, easily digestible and readily relatable.

God is a mystery. God's Presence is enveloped in mystery. Coming into God's Presence isn't like downloading a set of search results. It's like entering a thick cloud, where everything is obscured. Distorted. Colourless. Disorientated. But, there, in the midst of the cloud is the Presence of God who comes to be with us.

So, our challenge is to learn how to sit in the cloud, to learn patience, to learn to be comfortable not knowing everything we think we have to know, and to be open to change. Moses came down from the clouded mountain with his face radiant — changed. Because it's in the cloud that we're changed.

Peter, James, and John are changed on that mountain — forever. And, not because they learned lots of fun-filled facts. In reality, they probably descended with more questions than answers. But, like Moses, they met the Living God. And, that's what changes us. That's what alters the course of our lives. And, as Christians, that's what we're all about: being in God's Presence.

One of the often over-looked lessons of today's narrative is that the glory of God is only possible if lived together, in community. Nobody, not even Jesus, could shine alone! The work of that trinity shows that only when we are together that God's radiance can light each other's lives. We can only make sense of ourselves if the people who came before us are present in our struggle.

Our ancestors come to us to give us a thick sense of the present and to say that they survived under the name of God and we can do that too. Glory is only possible if shared and that means that we are to share the light of Christ to the world, especially those placed in the shadows of our society.

This is related to the second theological point that the shadow, into which they disappear, carries the voice of God affirming Jesus. In that way, when we light the lives of those placed in the shadows of society, we must know that it is from those shadows, from those clouds, that the voice of God appears, affirming Jesus!

Third, this metamorphosis directs Jesus back into his mission. While the disciples wanted to hang out there amidst those giants of faith and bask in the glory and transfiguration of Jesus, they were ordered to go back to their lives.

Astronaut Chris Hadfield wrote: *"The blast of glory that attends launch and landing doesn't last long. The spotlight moves on, and astronauts need to, too. If you can't, you'll end up hobbled by self-importance or by the fear that nothing else you do will ever measure up...More than 500 people have had the opportunity to see our planet from afar, and for most of them, the experience seems to have reinforced or*

induced humility—seeing the whole world... is not only awe-inspiring, but profoundly humbling. Space travel has made me feel I have a personal obligation to be a good steward of our planet and to educate others about what's happening to it."

"The spotlight moves on, and astronauts need to, too ..." Life moves on, and Christians who have been blessed to glimpse God's glory need to, too.

In between the transfiguration and the noisy streets of our lives, we keep silence, trying to figure out the transfigured Jesus, knowing that we are part of this transfiguration and that means that God will re-figure our lives, our thinking, our actions our path. When we meet the transfigured Jesus we are disfigured, transfigured, and re-figured.

At this juncture we can understand why the mountaintop story needs the story that follows the descent from the mountain – the story about the miracle of healing of the suffering boy. The boy is in psychological and social chains; the demons have taken hold of his life. There is way too much realism in his magical life, so Jesus has to intervene! The disciples were not transfigured enough to deal with it and the transfiguration of Jesus shows that Jesus has little patience with their lack of power, their lack of understanding and figuring out who he is and what message he has to offer. So, Jesus' indictment of the faith of the disciples "“You faithless and perverse generation,” sounds true to us as disciples of Jesus today.

Our world is dashing the poor against the rocks of despair, hunger, and abandonment everyday. The economic beast controlled by few demons is making

our people convulse day and night. The homeless, the immigrant, the incarcerated, those mothers who work three jobs to make a minimum wage to feed three, four kids, they are like that boy, thrown into the shadows of our society, convulsing day and night right in front of us! And we, who seem to not know anything about the transfiguration of Jesus or our own transfiguration (metamorphosis) are looking at these people while asking Jesus: “Can we dwell in our worship tabernacles basking in your glory, away from the people and their pressing needs?”

Unless we get out of the fortress of our worship spaces, and rebuke the unclean spirits of the powers that be, and shed light into the lives of the poor of our communities, we will never know what transfiguration means. *Glory* will be an unknown word and experience. We can have a sound theology and say, in that passage, Jesus is the point of beginning and end, the past and the future giving weight to our present, the conciliation of opposite poles, the connection between the shadow and the light of God, the incarnation of the most divine glory. However, if in the name and by the grace of God we cannot heal the children of our communities and our world and give them back to their parents, we will never know what transfiguration means, what shared glory looks like and we will never be “astounded at the greatness of God.”

To retreat to worship, to listen to the Word, to be immersed in the cross, and to be gathered in prayer leads inevitably to a return to the “everyday world” of human need where Jesus heals the sick and opposes the forces of evil. If worship is a retreat, it is not a retreat from the world but a retreat in order to come back to the

world in love, mercy and grace. This, is what worship is meant to be, a moment of reflection, immersion, companionship, and prayer in order that we might embrace our callings in the world - to respond to the needs of God's beloved children - with renewed energy, confidence, and determination.

Do we always see this hour on worship each Sunday in these terms? Do we simply come out of routine or obligation? Or just to hear good music? Or for or a brief escape from the hectic pace of our lives? There are probably just as many motivations as there are people for coming to church. It is important to acknowledge, and to see a vision that church can be so, so much more. Worship can be the place where we hear God's voice, focus on the nature of grace as we experience it in the cross, meet each other in prayer and song, and leave renewed for lives of meaning and purpose that come through service to neighbour.

A young couple that was relatively new to the church, once explained to the pastor how important church had become for them. Whenever one of them could not make it – if, for instance, one of their children were sick – they'd do a quick two-minute drill to check in on the week they had just been through and the week about to come to determine, as they said, "who needed church more." "Church is what helps us make sense of our lives," they explained, "it's that pick-me-up that connects us with God and our calling and sends us back into the week."

I wonder if any of our members ever feel that way? Maybe half? Or maybe just a quarter? What a difference that would make to all the corners of the community

and world you touch if church were your pick-me-up that connects you with God and your calling! That's the opportunity we have before us each and every week, to be reminded that you are God's beloved children, that God has in Jesus' cross and resurrection revealed just how much God loves us and that this love conquers all, and has called, commissioned, and equipped us to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Just imagine, what could happen as more and more of us, upon hearing this message, would catch this vision. It may just be that our worship – and along with it, the whole Church – is transfigured by the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Amen.