

**A New Perspective, February 14, 2021,
Cathy Davis, Maple Grove UMC**

Today's story from Mark is a quintessential mountain top experience.

A powerful experience of being in the presence of the holy, a moment when God breaks-through, when we're astonished into seeing something we've never seen before. We don't just see something new; we see in a new way. A new perspective is revealed. We are changed.

These experiences can be hard to talk about. On multiple occasion Jesus even told people after a miraculous event, like he told the disciples in today's story, don't talk about it - yet.

There are those experiences that we need to pause and savor. We need time to let them work on us, transform us. Time to let them dislodge our old ways of thinking and viewing the world, as we gradually gain a new perspective.

Sometimes, after an unusually extraordinary experience, we try to fit it into an existing pattern, and when it doesn't fit, we may dismiss it. Or rewrite it.

Today's story is one that is so fantastical that it could easily be dismissed as just a dream, a fantasy, some sort of hallucination.

We're told that Peter, James and John, climbed with Jesus to the top a mountain, where the disciple saw Elijah and Moses, who are both long dead, talking to Jesus, whose clothes turned a brilliant white. Then God's voice came out of the cloud saying, "this is my beloved son, listen to him." What a vision. It terrified the disciples.

Something mysterious happened on that mountain. Something beyond any rational explanation.

Admittedly, in my youth, I joked with a bit of smart aleck skepticism about my mother's mysterious experiences: visits from dead loved one, her encounter with angels, God's hand on her shoulder, and God taking the steering wheel of her car to guide her to safety.

And yet, most of my life I was hoping God would show up in some supernatural way; to confirm another reality I was beginning to perceive and to explain the purpose of it all!

I don't know if the rest of you have ever hoped and waited for God to make an otherworldly appearance, but I suspect most of us have at least wished at one time or

another that God would just speak to us, loud and clear, and tell us what we're supposed to do.

Peter, James and John were there to for that moment when God appeared. And in Peter's fear, the scripture says, he didn't know what to say so he blurted out "let's build three dwellings." Yet, this significant story, recorded in the 3 synoptic Gospels and 2nd Peter, is missing a lot of important details. Mark doesn't tell us why they climbed to the top of a very high mountain, (though the Gospel of Luke said it was to pray), or how the disciples knew it was Moses and Elijah, and *what was* Jesus, Elijah and Moses talking about? And why is Jesus luminous?

Again, the Gospel of Luke tells a little more by saying that Jesus was talking to Elijah and Moses – about his soon-to-be departure.

Some Bible scholars place this event about 40 days prior to Jesus' ride into Jerusalem. Jesus would have known the dark days ahead, the pain and suffering that lay before him if he continued the path, he was on.

He was publicly calling out the religious and political leaders for their hypocrisy and greed, he was challenging the social structure, and blatantly breaking laws by healing on the sabbath and touching the unclean; the powers that be were going to stop him. They were going to silence him – it was only a matter of time.

Here we are in this season after epiphany, with another brilliant light, appearing to us, just before we begin the arduous journey to the cross.

We began this season with a bright shining star guiding us to baby Jesus. And now, the light shines, radiating **from** Jesus, brighter than any earthly white. Along with another pronouncement, similar to one at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, my beloved." And God tells us "Listen to him!"

From his birth, to these three decades later, we've been given signs, and messages, "watch, listen, pay attention to Jesus. Do what he does."

Today's scripture is at an intersection between God's story and the human story, and it reads like a fable, or a myth. Yet, the real supernatural story is that Jesus became human to show us how to become divine. It was what Jesus said and how Jesus lived, that was truly astonishing and otherworldly.

Yes, there were supernatural events going on to be sure – whenever Jesus touched the untouchables. Every time Jesus forgave sins - even before the sinners had repented.

The extraordinarily, unusual occurrences were when Jesus asked the blind beggar *what can I do for you?* When Jesus told the paralytic he could *pick up your mat and walk?* When the leper asked Jesus are you willing to heal me and Jesus answered, *yes, I'm willing.* When Jesus suggested the *one without sin throw the first stone?* When Jesus said *love your enemy.*

Something unbelievable occurred when Jesus climbed the mountain and gave the sermon: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers.

And, in a luminous moment, a voice called out from the clouds and says, "He's my beloved son, listen to him." Listen to him. Jesus became human to show us how to transfigure into the divine. **Jesus** became the light to shine in the darkness.

So, I really wanted my bright shining moment with God. Yet, I have not had the visual and auditory experience with the transfigured Christ. However, Jesus did come to me, and in some mysterious way, I knew that it was Jesus, I can't describe him by looks, I can't tell you what his voice sounded like, but I feel sure, Jesus spoke to me.

It was one of the times in my life when I was struggling with feelings of inadequacy, and on the advice of a spiritual guide, I made my own climb up the mountain to pray, I talked to Jesus about the feelings of inadequacy— of not good enough – not capable enough. And without hesitation, Jesus told me, "Neither was I, I can do nothing on my own, it is only God through me." And I had a new perspective of myself, my sense of inadequacy diminished a bit, and my understanding of God's amazing love and grace grew.

That mountaintop experience came on the shores of Lake Erie for me.

God has also appeared to me in the chapel on a Good Friday, as a voice, saying, "allow yourself to be crucified." I knew God was asking me to humble myself. To be less concerned about protecting my opinions and position, and more interested in listening to others.

God has spoken to me in the shower, on my sick bed, and in the company of loved ones. As I said, from here, on Baptism Sunday, God spoke to me this very epiphany season saying, "follow the light out of the darkness."

When my son Will, was 16 years old, he had a figurative and literal mountain top experience while in the Smoky Mountains on a Maple Grove youth mission trip. He said the mission team had gathered a one of the highest peaks, and they were to find a spot

to sit in silence, to pray and journal. As he sat there, he began to look around, he found himself spontaneously smiling at the beauty and perfection of the world, and then he began to laugh out loud and roll around on the ground, and his laughter turned into tears of joy, because he was convinced there was a God.

God appears. Opens our eyes, reveals a new perspective, give us a vision. Both for our sake, and for the sake of others.

Dr. Martin Luther King told us he had “been to the mountain top.” And from there, he saw the promised land. And in that vision, he saw that one day, this great country would live up to its ideals. One day it would be a sacred place where all of God’s children would stand as equals on level, fertile ground. There would be racial equality, justice, and freedom for all. From where he stood, he saw black and white folks joining hands, in unity, working together, and transforming the discord of our nation into a “beautiful symphony.”

We surely need these transfiguration experiences, God visions, God perspectives.

Did the transfiguration on the mountain top literally happen, I don’t know, however, I believe the transfiguration happens every time we humble ourselves to listen and serve, every time we love rather than judge, every time we speak words of blessing, every time we see Christ in each other, and whenever we recognize that we are standing on holy ground. The world gets a little brighter. And it is all by the grace of God. Because, on my own, I can do nothing.

Now, as we turn towards lent, and undertake the most difficult scriptural passages, prepare yourself. Take time to fast and pray and serve and give alms. Let’s begin this journey together and allow God to illuminate us and love to guide us.
Happy Valentine’s Day.