

Unveiling Our Lives
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2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Luke 9:28 – 36 (37-43)

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Several years ago we visited friends who had moved from Elma, NY to Ashville, North Carolina. They took us to see some sights that were just breath taking! After the first day Phyllis and Bob asked if we would like to take a moderate hike up Mount Pisgah to an old fire tower where we could view the Blue Ridge Mountains from on top! I am not a mountain climber but, Phyllis assured me it was doable and I never want to be one who says I can't.

The early trail was easy and gave me great confidence for the journey! About halfway up it got a bit more difficult. I was sliding a bit and my face was red. Bob said he was going to wait there with the dog and I could join him. But, I was almost there and I am not a quitter! I slowly made it up the remainder of the way. I climbed up that fire tower and crawled into a corner to catch my breath! Moderate my foot!! Yet when I caught my breath and my head was on straight from the altitude I stood up to take a look. There is nothing quite like the view from the top of a mountain. The world is peaceful, picturesque, perfect even. If I've made it to the top to enjoy the view, I am going to stay a good long while before I can begin the climb back down. And let me tell you that view was spectacular so I was in no hurry to leave. I would have been nice to just stay.

When I hear Peter's desire to stay on the mountaintop in the presence of Jesus, Moses and Elijah I understand. If I was captured by the views from the top of Mount Pisgah, how much more so might I be enthralled by the view of God? While building tabernacles and hanging out on a mountaintop isn't exactly what God wanted for the long term, Peter tried to respond to this moment, this incomprehensible event. And the voice from heaven was not scolding Peter, the voice commanded Peter to listen without any other comment.

It's likely that they spent the night on the mountain purely to rest. Maybe they had to stay long enough to soak in some rays of glory so they would have what they needed for the coming days. Capturing the glory of God in a dwelling wasn't a good idea, but taking time to sit still and rest in the aftermath of the divine light was the best response possible.

Peter, James and John probably had no idea what they would encounter after they came down from the mountain. Likely Jesus did. "Here's what was happening down below while Jesus turned bleachy on a hilltop."

In the valley, a boy writhes in the dust. He drools, he cannot hear, and his eyes — wide-open, feral — sees nothing but darkness. Around him a crowd gathers and swells, eager for spectacle. Scribes jeer, and disciples wring their hands in shame. "Frauds!" someone yells into the night. "Charlatans!" "Where's your Master?" the scribes ask the disciples an umpteenth time. "Why has he left you?" "We don't know," the disciples mutter, gesturing vaguely at the mountain. Panic wars with exhaustion as they hear the boy shriek yet again — an echo straight from hell. He flails, and his limbs assault his stricken face. A voice — strangled, singular — rends the night. "This is my son!" a man cries out as he pushes through the crowd to gather the convulsing boy into his arms. Everyone stares as the father cradles the wreck of a child against his chest. "Please," he sobs to the stars. "Please. This is my beloved son. Listen to him."

The crowd gathered there with their ignorance, fear, and needs is the same crowd that always gathered around Jesus then and now. They didn't grasp that God was in their midst, but they knew that Jesus could do something for them that they could not do for themselves. He could calm, quiet and cast out demons. And he did. And people saw the glory of God yet again.

Today in this very familiar text the glory of God is revealed in spectacular fashion — 2 times. The brilliant glow on the top of the mountain was the first. The casting out of a demon was the second. The first has become a metaphor for the search for intense spiritual experiences that are coveted by so many and rationalized as rare and fleeting. The latter has become the metaphor for 'real life,' the valley in which we should be living and working. We are told so often that we can't stay on the top of the mountain because there is work to do. That's one reason I will return here to Kenmore UMC after a trip to the warmer climates of California and a visit to our family there. Really, we can't stay on top of the mountain because it isn't practical. God does not live in the buildings built by human hands in a particular place, no matter how beautiful or sacred the place.

Similarly, that crowd that was needy and demanding isn't necessarily everyday life and work, either. Sometimes we are crowd. Sometimes we are the confused disciples in the crowd. Sometimes we are the ones possessed. How often to we

notice when Jesus has cast out our demons? We might notice later, when we are moving on to somewhere else. Debie Thomas in her commentary *A View from the Valley* says, “We tend to interpret the Bible as if its stories apply only to *me* — the individual: *My* mountaintop experience, *My* valley, *My* relationship with God. The truth is that my mountain lies next to your valley. The truth is that your pain does not cancel out my joy. The truth is that it is entirely possible for you to sit in church on Sunday morning and bask in the sweet presence of God's Spirit — while one pew over another cries one's eyes out because the ache of God's absence feels unbearable.

Somehow, we have twisted this story into an either/or and life is almost always both/and. We don't always live on top of the radiant mountain nor do we constantly live with messy crowds and demanding demons. Mostly, we are in between. The point of the story is that God's glory is revealed in both places. Yes, differently, but God is there in all God's glory on top of the mountain and down in the valley. And for all of those times in between times. God is there too! Remember Jesus traveled with his disciples – up the mountain, on top of the mountain, down the mountain, and in the midst of the crowd.

And so here's the great challenge to the Christian life — the great challenge to the Church, Christ's body: will we remove the veil of our human desires to see the glory of God on the mountain, in the valley and in the between? Following the decisions of our General Conference, I have been in the valley while others have been on the mountaintop. God has been present! Can we hold the mountain and the valley in faithful tension with each other — denying neither, embracing both? Can we do this hard, hard work out of pure love for each other, so that no one among us - not the joyous one, not the anguished one, not the beloved one, not the broken one - is ever truly alone?

In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of Moses veil, the hardening of the mind that kept the Israelites from living into the glory of God. They didn't want to be changed - neither do we at times. We don't know what change will mean for us, what it will take away from us, where it will call us to go, or what it will call us to do. We resist being changed in a way that will make us bear witness to justice. We resist being changed in a way that will enable us to share God's glory instead of trying to hold onto it. All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Today we come to the Lord's Table; some in a valley, others on a mountaintop. Listen for God! Having seen the light of Epiphany, we prepare now for the long darkness and wilderness of Lent. Listen for God! Maybe you'll hear glory or

agony. Both voices need to speak and have much to teach us; listen. Both voices are beloved of our God. Our true identity as Christian is found in the love of God that has been written upon our hearts. The work of the Christian believer, is not to lose heart but to continue to look, listen and act – no matter what the circumstances of life – with boldness in the direction of God’s redeeming work of love and mercy. Amen.