

2 Kings 2:1-12
 Psalm 50:1-6
 2 Corinthians 4:3-6
 Mark 9:2-9

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Let us pray. Jesus, we are afraid of being blinded by your light. Help us keep our eyes open to your presence. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen

Epiphany ... Theophany ...
 Transfiguration ...

We get a lot of theological terms as we move through this part of the church year.

Epiphany – revealing ... An epiphany is a moment when something suddenly becomes clear to us. It is not necessarily a religious term, but the word became associated with a specific moment in the life of the church. Epiphany with a capital “E” is the day when we celebrate the visit of the Magi to Jesus ... the day when the Lord of all nations is revealed to the Gentiles.

Theophany – seeing God ... A theophany is a time when we see God. It may be like an epiphany moment – when God is revealed in some new and wonderful way. It may be much more

subtle than that. But it is a moment in which we see God.

Transfiguration – radical change in appearance ... This word becomes associated with what happened to Jesus on the mountain, but it wouldn't have to be a religious term at all. It is simply a radical change in how something appears.

So here on the mountain the disciples Peter, James & John experience all three ... It is an epiphany moment when the nature of who Jesus is suddenly revealed to them ... It is a theophany as they see Jesus in all his glory as God incarnate ... It is a transfiguration as Jesus' appearance is radically changed from ordinary human being to God's one-and-only Son.

And Peter, who is utterly terrified by the whole thing – or perhaps is terrified in an awestruck way – says, “Hey, let's camp here for awhile.”

Yeah, wouldn't it be great to have such a moment – seeing the full glory of God shining forth from Jesus' face – and be able to stay there for awhile?

The problem is that we don't all get to go up the mountain. Only Peter & James & John – three of twelve disciples – got to go up the mountain with Jesus. The other nine only heard the stories about it ... and that only

after Jesus had died and was raised from the dead.

And the same is true for us – some among us have spectacular moments ... epiphanies ... theophanies ... and maybe even a moment when there is a transfiguration ... some get to see God's glory in an amazing fashion ... but they cannot stay there – they have to come back down the mountain at some point ... no camping in the glory of God allowed ... and the rest of us just have to live in that valley below the mountain ...

So, how do we see God in our lower-than-the-mountain-top experiences in life? When is Jesus revealed in all his glory for us who stay in the valleys? And how do we encourage our friends and families who have never been to the mountaintop, either, and have no idea what the glory of God might look like?

And what gods of this world keep people blinded to the glory of God as Jesus showed it to us? Or what veil is shrouding the God of love shown to us in Jesus?

For myself, I think that I lose track of God's presence when I am focused on me above all other things. When I am focused on some THING that I want for myself – whether or not I actually need it ... when I am stewing over some EVENT in which I think I was

given a raw deal and I deserve better ... when I feel I was hurt by someone or several someone's and they should make it up to me somehow ... when the universe seemed to conspire against me and things just didn't work out *the way I wanted them to* ...

Did you notice how many times the words "I" and "ME" showed up in that paragraph? Pride and greed are probably the biggest gods that get in the way of me seeing the One True God. And I miss seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus, when I look *only* for the glory of that mountaintop.

Because we know that when Jesus came down from the mountain, he was on his way to Jerusalem ... where he would be put on trial for a crime he didn't commit ... where he would be wrongfully convicted of that crime and executed ... not because he was guilty, but because the gods of this world – the gods of power and greed and pride – blinded the people to the One True God and to the Good News that this One True God loved them beyond measure.

Where do we see the glory of Jesus revealed? How do share the glory of God with those who have never been to the mountaintop?

We see the glory of Jesus revealed on the cross. We share the glory of God through love and forgiveness. We

travel to the mountaintop by way of the empty tomb.

One day we will see the face of Jesus. One day we will see the full glory of God in all of its awesome power. And in the mean time, we remember that the path to that glory is through the grave. We will one day die, and THEN we will see God face to face and we will be transfigured into a new life in an eternal body. One day ...

And for now, we see the face of Jesus in the love that we share with others. We see the glory of God in the forgiveness that we give and receive. We see the awesome power of God in the humble service offered by God's people – as they – as WE – work together to make the world a better place for all people.

Is this a blinding light and a thundering voice speaking out of cloud at the top of a mountain? Well, no. It probably feels more like a flashlight shining through a fog in a dark valley ... at least some of the time.

I overheard a conversation between a pastor and another person last week. It had come up in the context of things happening in the Middle East ... violence begets violence ... and there seems to be a never-ending cycle of killing. And the person said something to the effect of, "How can you condone what those evil people have done?"

How can you claim to love and care for people and then expect them to forgive these horrible actions? How can you ask them to forgive the people who tortured and killed their friends and families?"

The pastor's response was, "I do not condone killing. But I do encourage people to forgive. We pray a prayer every day asking God to forgive us our sins. And we ask God to help us forgive those who sin against us."

The person replied, "You may be a minister and you may be able to forgive people no matter how good or bad they are, but my forgiveness has limits."

I imagine all of us find that our ability to forgive has limits. All of us find ourselves living in dark valleys filled with fog. All of us long to be on the mountaintop with the dazzling light of Christ shining on us and the clear voice from the cloud telling us what we should believe and do.

Jesus reminds us that we cannot live on the mountain. And we cannot truly understand the glory of God until we pass through death and the grave to the day of resurrection.

We can only walk beside Jesus – the ordinary human – and trust that God is here, too.

15 February 2015

Theophany?

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Amen. Let it be so.