



**A Sermon for The Transfiguration
August 6, 2023**

New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH



**Guest Lay Preacher
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Transfiguration Sunday

We have been moving through the story of salvation.

Genesis' account of the origin of the people of Israel.

Evidence of God moving in history by interacting with three generations of a particular family. This is a personal relationship with a promise to become a nation.

It needs to be said that encountering God transforms lives.

But when we move from the story of the Patriarchs to the story of Moses, God must reestablish his personal relationship with the children of Israel. Here is a Prince, who is of the Hebrews, but not raised as a Hebrew, drawn out to become a leader, and then, in his exile to the wilderness, God calls to Moses.

Twice. Once to see the burning bush and hear the name of the God of his ancestors. A second time after bringing the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

We have come, for obvious reasons, to call these "mountaintop experiences." These are thin places where the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual blur. Moses went up into the presence of Yahweh to hear what the will of God was for the people of Israel.

Ten rules to live by.

And what was the result of that encounter with God; Moses' face shown, reflecting the light of the Almighty so much that he had to wear a veil to symbolize the thin space between God and the dusty Hebrews. The veil is, like Moses, acting as a mediator between the physical and the spiritual.

We all have thin moments in our lives. We all have had occasional mountaintop experiences in which God speaks to us. Where we encounter the divine.

I will tell you one of mine. I was young, about seven years old riding up to a summer camp in the Sierra Nevada's outside of California's San Joaquin Valley. A lakeside camping ground run by dad's stepfather's family. Hume Lake Christian camp. The four of us were driving up the mountain road, and I had a sense that my early church school and Christian environment was leading me to a personal acceptance of Christ. So, I spoke about it with my parents, and they encouraged me to pray, speak about it, accept it. We all have a point at which we do that. Everybody experiences it for themselves. At the point I felt acceptance, I had a sense of awe, and a fear of the great yawning of eternity unrolled before me. It was a lot for a 7-year-old.

How did you experience your coming to faith? What was your Jesus story? How do you encounter the sacred?

Peter's experience was just as overwhelming. Jesus took Peter, and the brothers, James and John up to the mountain. A place of prayer. As a parallel to Moses, Jesus encountered God. His face was shining, clothed in radiant white. Moses appeared, along with Elijah, another prophet, with a mountain-top encounter. This one with the still, small voice of God. The two of them speaking with Jesus of his coming ordeal. The Greek word used for departure in Luke is "exodon," another parallel with the earlier exodus.

Moses' great salvation led these wandering tribes to the promised land becoming the great nation of God's promise. Jesus' great salvation leads us to the Kingdom of God.

And yet, Peter was overwhelmed. The three disciples, heavy with sleep, are unsure of what to do. Peter, ever the active disciple, feels the need to do something.

He wants to prolong the experience, wants to contain, memorialize, and honor the presence of the two prophets and his Lord. But that's not what was asked of them.

Several days before this, Peter was declaring Jesus the Christ, answering the question "who do you say that I am?" Yahweh answers that very question on the mountain top, "This is my beloved son. Listen to him."

In the midst of all the other voices in our world, the busy-ness and broken-ness of our lives, we are asked to listen to the words of God's Beloved, Begotten, Son, and trust that his message is God's will for our lives. It took the death and resurrection of Jesus for the stumbling, bumbling disciples to really understand the will and word of God.

Several weeks ago, I heard a sermon from the Reverend Randy Hollerith at National Cathedral. He spoke about discipleship and how to bring about the Kingdom of God. The question I got out of the sermon was 'what is the nature of your discipleship?' Can you change your heart, can you become like Christ? How have you built the kingdom?

I would ask a similar question. What have you done with your mountain top experiences? How has encountering God changed your life? Have you shared your story?

I will tell you another mountaintop experience. It was the spring of '96. My last week in the Navy. I was on board my aircraft carrier, the JFK, and we were sailing back into Mayport naval station Florida. As the day moved towards evening, I went up to the flight deck for the sea breeze and to catch a view of and the warmth of the sun. We were sailing into the sunset with a line of clouds just above the horizon.

I was on the cusp of a major change in my life, the sun was actually setting on my Navy experience, and I was unsure how the next chapter would unfold. It was definitely a thin space and while I didn't feel the holy spirit, this was probably a moment where it

was God's footsteps in the sand instead of mine. To punctuate the emotions of the evening, as the sun was sinking below the horizon, a radio with some of the other crew working around the flight deck started playing the Eagles 'Desperado.'

The mountaintop experience, by its very character, is intended to evoke a change in what comes next. It is faith, it is spiritual. It is encountering the divine. It is to be so profound that you have changed. Do you shine like Moses? Is your soul bleached white like the garments of Jesus?

Usually, not that obvious, but you have definitely transfigured a part of your life and the question you would ask is how, and the next question is what's next? You don't usually look for mountain top experiences, but they are usually recognizable when they happen, and you can feel a call to that transforming encounter.

I am sure if you look back through your life you can recognize a few significant moments. What was the change that happened after? Was it accepting Christ? Was it the beginning of a new chapter?

Was it a ministry or a relationship that you felt compelled to begin or deepen?

I again ask, what have you done? What has each of us done, as a result of our mountain top experiences, and how does it change the nature of our spiritual reality?

Amen

6.25.23 Sunday Sermon by The Very Rev Randy Marshall Hollerith

<https://youtu.be/JDUO02uDv2w>