

Listen, Get Up, Don't Be Afraid, Tell No One

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-11

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February 10, 2002

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Some people claim there are *thin places* in our world, places where heaven and earth meet, places where we see things ordinarily hidden. For thousands of years men and women have climbed high mountains to bury their loved ones and to see into heaven. People say that Machupichu, located high in the Peruvian Andes, is one of those thin places. Eastern Orthodox Christians believe Mount Athos is one of those thin places where heaven and earth meet. The Bible doesn't mention *thin* spaces as such, but does speak of the appearance of God on mountains. Lightening flashed from Mt Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments from the hand of God. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on top of Mount Carmel. And Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain and he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared talking with him. A bright cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

A physics professor in New England teaches a junior high Sunday school class. After reading the story of the Transfiguration to his young teenage students one of them said, "Mr. Crampton, *I* don't believe that story and neither do *you*." (Rutledge) The young skeptic was merely expressing modern incredulity. How could an intelligent, well-educated physics professor believe such a paranormal story? I was trained in college and seminary to explain experiences like the Transfiguration in psychological terms. If Peter, James and John had come to my study to tell me what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration my first thought would be, "What did these guys get high on? They've had some kind of hallucination. They've been

who I was or what I was doing. I remember taking communion to an old man in a nursing home. He had Alzheimer's disease. He didn't know who *I* was. He didn't know *where* he was. He didn't know who *he* was. I dreaded going through the ritual. Using the old Book of Common Worship I began, "Here what comfortable words our Savior, Christ, says to all who truly turn to him." He didn't hear a word I said. I continued, "Now hear the words of the Institution of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ as they are delivered unto us by the apostle Paul." He looked at me with a vacant stare. I prayed, "Gracious God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose once offering up of himself we commemorate before thee...." And while I was praying I wondered, "Why am I doing this?" After the prayer of consecration I took the bread, held it up before him, and before I could say anything his face lit up. His eyes opened wide. He smiled a sweet smile. And he said clearly and distinctly, "The Body of Christ."

Since then I've never doubted the importance of taking Holy Communion to shut-ins.

Next week - Communion

Holy Communion takes us to one of those thin places where heaven and earth meet and Christ is transfigured. In Holy Communion, the veil separating heaven and earth is lifted briefly. God is with us visibly and palpably. In the Bread and Wine – the glory of the crucified and risen Christ shines and strengthens us for a future clouded in mystery but bright with opportunities.

How through this Sacrament of simple things
The great God burns His way,
I know not -- He is there.
The silent air
Is pulsing with the presence of His grace,
Almost I feel a face
Bend o'er me ...
The Word
Takes flesh and dwells with men,
And once again
Dim eyes may see
His gentle glory shine...
(G.A. Studdert-Kennedy)

under a lot of stress. They've been working too hard." I'd try to get them into psychological counseling.

But my guess is that more people than we realize have been to the mountaintop and seen the glory of the Lord. Last year I invited people to write up miraculous or paranormal experiences they've had. People came to me and said, "I've never said anything to anybody and then they quietly shared some paranormal experience they once had." People don't like to talk about their experience with God for fear of being thought crazy. As I've grown older I've become more open to accounts of people who have visited thin places where heaven and earth meet. As a result I believe the story of the Transfiguration. I believe two things happened to Peter, James and John on the Holy Mountain. ^① A curtain was drawn back momentarily and they were able to see Jesus - see who Jesus really is. ^② The vision prepared them for what was ahead. The curtain went up and then suddenly closed.

The story of the Transfiguration comes in the middle of the ministry of Jesus. His ministry had lost some of its initial popularity. He began to face increasing opposition. People were accusing him of blasphemy, witchcraft, and Sabbath breaking. His cousin, John the Baptist had doubts about him. His own family thought he was crazy. Disturbing rumors of a murder plot were circulating. Jesus was aware of all this and knew he was headed for rejection. Just then, on a mountaintop God's face shines on Jesus. "This is my Son, the Beloved." We heard those words and that voice once before when Jesus was baptized. We will hear those words again after the resurrection when God declared Jesus to be the Son of God with power. The Transfiguration experience strengthened Jesus as well as Peter, James, and John for the trying events that were to follow – the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus.

God may still prepare us for coming tough times. On the night before he was killed, Martin Luther King was in Memphis, Tennessee to support striking sanitation workers. He

preached a sermon that night that people said transfigured him. "I've been to the mountaintop", he cried. "I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight; I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." (Rutledge)

Dr. King was under attack. Liberal Christians thought he was moving too fast. Conservatives accused him of being a Communist. But that night, he led his followers up a high mountain. When he preached he was transfigured. His face shone like the sun. A curtain was opened briefly and the people listening knew that God can be trusted in the darkest night and that God can make a way out of no way.

A friend of mine said to me confidentially, "I was alone with my sister the night she died. She'd been struggling for a long time with cancer and now her ^{death} end was drawing near. They put her on a morphine drip. She was in and out of a coma. I sat with her all day but she didn't know what I was saying or who was in the room with her. Early in the morning she awoke briefly from her coma. In a rare moment of lucidity she lifted her head, opened her eyes, and looked, not at me, but as if there were someone else in the room. She reached out her hand as if to touch an invisible presence. She smiled and her face shone with joy. Then, as clear as could be, she said, 'I'm so glad you've finally come. I knew you would come.' Her head sank back on her pillow and she drifted off again into a coma and never awoke." My friend told me this story somewhat sheepishly. Then he asked me, "It was probably just an hallucination, don't you think?"

I was an assistant pastor in Portsmouth, Ohio. One of my duties was to take communion to shut-ins. I found this tedious and time-consuming. Some shut-ins had no understanding of