

## The Glory of the Mountain Top

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on The Transfiguration of the Lord, February 14, 1988. Scripture Lessons: 2 Kings 2:1-12a; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, & HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN  
Probably all of us, at some point in our life, have experienced

something mysterious, something unexplainable; perhaps so unexplainable and mysterious that you've been afraid to mention it to anyone lest they think you're crazy. I read where an anonymous poll of airline pilots ~~was~~ <sup>showed</sup> taken showing that far more pilots see UFOs than report the sightings.

They don't report the sightings simply because they're afraid their superiors will think they're crazy and they might lose their jobs.

Sometimes people tell me of strange experiences they've had but have kept secret for years because they fear people won't believe them. Maybe you've had that kind of experience.

The night my father died my mother dreamed she heard the telephone ring. She answered the phone and a voice said, "12.62". That's all. "12.62". She woke up wondering what the dream meant. She noticed the time. It was about midnight. Just then the phone really did ring, she answered it, and someone from the hospital told her my father was very bad and she should get into the hospital immediately. When she got there my father had already died. The doctor noted that he died at 1.02. "12.62". You've had strange kinds of experiences too, I'm sure. There's a mysterious element in life which defies explanation and rational understanding.

The Bible's a mysterious book. It faithfully reflects this mysterious element in life. The world of the Bible is a world where the invisible world and the visible world penetrate one another. There's no thick wall separating heaven from earth. Look at this incident in the life of Jesus that we call the Transfiguration. What a mysterious experience! It was the end of a busy day. The Lord took Peter, James and John and journeyed

up a mountainside. They were all alone in the dark. I imagine they could hear the crickets chirping and the breeze in the <sup>branches?</sup> branches and the sound of their sandals on the dirt path. But suddenly when they reached the top something strange happened. They saw the Lord transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white. Then they saw Moses and Elijah appear, talking with Jesus. Moses had been dead for over a thousand years and Elijah for over 500 years. No, that's strange. Then a cloud appeared and enshrouded them, and out of the cloud God spoke. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. It's all very mysterious and awesome.

It's this element of mystery, awe, and wonder that I want to focus on this morning. *God intends our worship of him to be a transfiguring experience for us.* (Something like this may happen to you this morning. It may happen when you have your private time of prayer. I say it *may* happened but there's no way you can manipulate it. When we worship God the windows of heaven may be opened.) In worship we join the saints and angels in heaven. The glory of the presence of the Lord overshadows us. And in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments we actually see, feel, hear and touch the risen and glorified Christ.

In true Christian worship the choir, the liturgy, the pastor and everything in the service is meant to point us to Jesus, so that we see Jesus only.<sup>3</sup> <sup>we do not preach ourselves, but Christ.</sup> And it happens. It *may* happen for you this morning. It's happened to me! I come each week to this sanctuary hoping, praying, expecting to encounter Christ and see him in his glory. That's why worship is so important for me. In worship I've seen Christ in his glory and I've been energized and transfigured.

This strange, mysterious incident, the Transfiguration of our Lord,

assures us that heaven isn't far from earth. Heaven is very near and it's our main purpose in our worship, both private and corporate, to draw near to God. <sup>Through Christ</sup> Peter, James and John were three hard-nose businessmen. They were fishermen. They weren't airy idealists or dreamy philosophers. They had fish to catch and sell, nets to mend, bills to pay, accounts to balance. But on the slopes of that mountain they suddenly realized that they were in a realm that superceded all of that. The presence and the glory of God became far more real than the grass at their feet, their ledger books in their office, or the snow covered mountain peaks around them.]

Heaven isn't some far-off sphere beyond the stars; heaven is very close. It interpenetrates the material universe in which we live. It touches us at every point. Heaven is wherever God's name is hallowed and his will is done. ~~At any moment a common-ordinary bush may burst into the flame of~~ the presence of God as it did for Moses long ago. At any moment we may hear in the wind that howls in winter a whisper from beyond time. Three hundred years ago Samuel Rutherford was thrown into a cold stone prison in Edinburgh, Scotland because he dared to speak out against the King who wanted to usurp the crown rights of Jesus Christ. Rutherford told him that the King doesn't tell the church what to do. Only the Lord Jesus is the head of the church. So he was thrown into prison. The future was dark and the possibility of his death was very real. Nevertheless Rutherford wrote to a friend, "Jesus Christ came into my cell last night, and every stone flashed like a ruby." True Christian worship focuses on Christ as Lord and is meant to be a transfiguring experience for us.

In worship God comes close to us. In the act of corporate worship common water becomes the Water of Rebirth and the gateway into the Kingdom of God. Common bread and wine become for us the Communion of

the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Common, ordinary words become the means by which God speaks to us. And as we sing and praise God in song we join with all the saints and angels in heaven in their worship.

Let me share with you a brief word of personal testimony at this point. I grew up in churches which had evangelistic services, song services, and preaching services. But my heart longed for something more. I felt something was missing. It wasn't until college that I attended a church where I discovered what my heart was longing for. It was a worship service; the choir and the organ were beautiful but it wasn't a concert or religious entertainment. The Gospel was preached but it wasn't an evangelistic service. It was a worship service that focused on the Risen Christ. I met God. I saw Christ. The windows of heaven were opened and ~~I've never been the same. That's what I long for in all our worship~~ services.

Christ takes us by the hand this morning and invites us to climb with him up the mountain of transfiguration. As we climb that mountain with others and with Christ we find ourselves breathing the atmosphere of heaven. In the presence of the glorified Christ we're brought into communion, not only with God, but with the whole company of the redeemed in heaven and on earth. Not only Moses and Elijah but our own loved ones who've passed beyond the veil are with us on this holy mount. And then we go back down the mountain. Down to our every day tasks, our business, our work, our play, our homes. But we've seen Christ in his risen glory. We know he is Lord. We know that because he lives we can face tomorrow and whatever it brings.

Let us pray: O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.