

Endings. Beginnings.

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
February 27, 2022
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

"Dazzling" A Blessing for Transfiguration Sunday

Believe me, I know how tempting it is
to remain inside this blessing,
to linger where everything is dazzling and clear.

We could build walls around this blessing, put a roof over it.
We could bring in a table, chairs, have the most amazing meals.
We could make a home. We could stay.

But this blessing is built for leaving.
This blessing is made for coming down the mountain.
This blessing wants to be in motion, to travel with you
as you return to level ground ...

—Jan Richardson

Source: Debie Thomas (Feb 22, 2022), *Down from the Mountain*

I'm going to draw heavily from theologian Debie Thomas here.¹ She points out that [Matthew, Mark and Luke] all tell the story of the Transfiguration, and all of them end their accounts with the narrative of the "demon-possessed" boy. This is no postscript, but as a "meanwhile." The storyteller saying something like, "Here's what [has been] happening down below while Jesus turned bleachy on a hilltop."

So why so often ignore that part of the Transfiguration story? Why do we treat the Transfiguration as main event, and the boy's story, if we mention it at all, as sidebar?

This, Thomas calls, a "mountaintop" spirituality, that needs to be challenged – the divide we create in our hearts and minds, between what we deem the sacred from events that we consider secular and ordinary. Quoting Richard Rohr she says:

We have created an artificial divide between the spiritual and the so-called non-spiritual... This [divide] is precisely what Jesus came to reveal as a lie. [Jesus, God enfleshed showed] that matter and spirit have never been separate...²

"The danger of 'God on the mountaintop' Christianity," she continues,
"is that it prompts me to compartmentalize my life. As if God is somehow more present during a rousing choral anthem, a stirring sermon, or a silent retreat in a seaside monastery, than God is when I'm doing the laundry, buying my groceries, or sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

So here's the great challenge of the Christian life: can we speak glory to agony, and agony to glory?

¹ "Down From the Mountain", an essay by Debie Thomas, February 19, 2022. Found at <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/3332-down-from-the-mountain>.

² Ibid.

While all the glory is witnessed up on the mountain, Matthew, Mark and Luke all remind us, that, down below, the other disciples are anxious, and a boy is suffering.

Can we hold the mountain and the valley as one – denying neither, and embracing both?

Can we do this hard work out of love and compassion for each other, so that no one among us is left to hurt and suffers where God's presence is harder to discern?

Epiphany and the season that followed brought us holy glimpses – a star, a dove descending, jugs of water turned to wine – but we cannot stay there, in the glory and Jesus in bleached white.

Leaving worship today, you and I will see more images in the news depicting a tyrant inflicting death and destruction on a neighbour – it seems biblical. We have seen polarized communities, myopic mobs using flags and symbols of hatred as they curse the government.

It is tempting for Peter and friends to stay in the spiritual bubble, but the world and God awaits him and us, in the journey.

Debie Thomas suggests that the light and darkness – the mountaintop and valley – are one, and that we need to be fed by both. Epiphany glimpses of God etched in our hearts, followers of Jesus' sojourn into Lent carrying ashes; reminded that we are utterly and wonderfully human. Fragile, yet we are told that we are made in the Creator's image.

Can you recall that instinct, that yearning not to leave a moment?

A baby born. Or a moment when your hard work is rewarded in a surprising way. Or, another 5cm of snow has fallen overnight and the plow has left a nice ridge at the end of your driveway. No, the glory was the good night's sleep you had. But as you grumble and shovel madly, you lift your head up for a moment to see light peaking out – the dawn is just now breaking over in the East. It is a new day. Catching a couple of minutes of Saturday Night Live last night, they opened the show with the powerful voices of a Ukrainian choir. I'm reminded that even as great evil unfolds overseas, holy resiliency plays out around the world – in prayers and song.

Let us stand with them, with generosity of spirit and action. The liturgical season of Lent begins as we leave the mountain. Be assured: God is right there in the muck of everyday life. Amen.