

A Mountaintop Experience: But then What?

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Among my favourite stories in the Bible is the Transfiguration story that Jill just told. It is dripping with mystery. People can try to explain it, scientifically, psychologically, sociologically, but the imagery of light, and the appearance of those heroes of the Hebrew Bible, Elijah, and Moses, tells me that this was an awe-inspiring moment. Let's hear a story imagined from Peter's perspective...

If Peter had kept a journal... Today was one of those days.

I meant well. I really did.

I had the chance to go with Jesus – James and John went, too – to climb a mountain, something I've always wanted to do but have been too busy to take the time. I've wondered what it might be like – the view from the top.

No sooner had we reached the top and caught our breath when I turned around to see Jesus, well – shining. Truly, he was shining, like when I was out on the boat and looked up directly at the sun on a cloudless day. One minute he's just Jesus; the next, his entire face was shining, and that dusty old tunic he always wears shimmered and shone.

But that wasn't all. I also saw Moses and Elijah – standing there talking to Jesus. It was amazing. And so, of course, I had lots of questions I wanted to ask them – I've heard their stories all my life, and there they stood, so close I could reach out and touch them. Was this really fulfillment of what had been predicted for so long?

So, I offered to build them each a tent, proper places to worship; we could all stay as long as necessary. Why rush into anything?

That's when things got really bizarre.

I was still talking, and a bright cloud covered all three of them up. A very mysterious voice – and I don't think it was Jesus' – said: "This is my son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him."

And then the voice practically yelled (and I swear it was aimed directly at me): "LISTEN TO HIM."

My knees buckled, and I fell flat on the ground, trembling. It was a humbling, awesome moment I'll never forget. It was like being in the presence of the Almighty.

Jesus came over and tapped us on the shoulder. He told the three of us to get up and not be afraid. Easy for him to say. When I looked up, the only one there was Jesus. I don't know what happened to the other two.

Jesus led us back down the mountain but made us swear we wouldn't say a word about these strange happenings until the Human One was raised from the dead. He talks like that a lot – in riddles – we often have to ask him what he means. I'm pretty sure he's the One.

I do wish we could have stayed up there longer – basking in that brilliant light – and hearing more from that mysterious voice. The view was incredible – I even thought I saw the boat I left on Galilee. But Jesus never stays in one place. I should have known. When I chose to follow him, I left my boat and my other life behind.

Note to self: Next time – don't make ridiculous suggestions in the middle of a miracle. It's Jesus, Peter! Just. Follow. Him. Today was one of those days. I meant well. I really did.

When I was a theology student, I tried to think too much about this passage, and my mark reflected the fact that I didn't get this story. Now, I still don't get it.

It is a moment of wonder. Peter wants to do something, say something, but nothing captures the power of the moment. He didn't get it. We humans are like that, aren't we. We overthink some things. I've done it too many times in my life, getting into my head when I should just stay in my heart. Can you relate? Moments where probably all that the Creator wants from us is an open heart and mind, willing to just sit, and listen, and watch, and experience. *That's all. Just be present in the moment.*

Then those poor disciples have to go back to normal living, back to sickness, economic woes, relationship challenges. Well... life.

How do we carry with us that experience of wonder, back down the mountain? Do we allow ourselves to be changed somehow by that experience of wonder that we are pondering? What in life stops us from taking our gratitude and wonder from our transfiguration moment into our everyday living?

Does everyday life get busy and distracting?

Do we hang onto bitterness like a badge of honour, survivors?

Do we forget to feel gratitude?

I invite you to reflect on "transfiguration" moments in your life, moments of wonder and awe. Sit in that memory of the moment, feel it. What did you do next? Jot down words or doodle in images as you ponder those moments, and perhaps write down the things in your life that distract you from gratitude and wonder. (*silence*)

Hold onto that paper, those words or images, and offer them to your Creator in quiet prayer.

May we, like Peter, learn to accept the holy gifts without overthinking, over-doing, rationalizing. Instead, may we learn to simply receive the gift, say thank you, and then to show our gratitude in all that we do and say as we journey from that sacred place. Amen.