

Wow, I don't want this to end

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
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One of the most striking statements in this passage reports the LORD saying, "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."

This theology plays out in that iconic scene from the finale of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Paramount) – Indiana Jones has discovered the Ark of the Covenant with the remnants of the Ten Commandments tablets in it, but the evil Nazis have taken control of the holy relic. The evil characters are about to open the Ark, but Indy cautions his friend to look away. The two who look away from the opened Ark of the Covenant, the manifestation of the Holy, are the only ones whose faces do not melt. This is the epitome of pop culture teaching biblical principles!"¹

There is a deep sense of awe, perhaps in the true spirit of awesome, even fearful or risky – these encounters that Moses has with the Creator.

Modern Jewish tradition respects this awe, even fear of getting too familiar in talking about the Creator. A Jew, and some Christian theologians, will not pronounce the divine name – not even writing it, instead you will see "G-d", or instead using the name Adonai.

The Creator has told Moses that the people need to move away from the Holy Mountain to make their epic journey. Moses is not sure about this change. There is something reassuring about being beside God on this Mountain.

"Are you sure about this, Holy One?" asks Moses.

"I will be with you," responds God.

It is here that Moses asks to behold the Holy, as dangerous as it is. Even if the experience might kill him. This is the assurance Moses and the Israelites have that Holy Presence will go with them – giving them courage in dangerous times, letting them know that they are not alone.

Do you have moments that we call theophany moments – an experience of the Divine? God, Adonai, Divine Wonder? I think back to the Sunday when we heard the story of the *Transfiguration*² of Jesus atop the mountain with Peter and James and John watching Jesus adorned by light. Peter, at an utter loss for words, wants to hold onto that moment, build a place of worship, paint a masterpiece, do something out of his sense of wonder.

Have you ever tried to take a photo of a perfect rainbow? I have, many times, spending my time trying to get the right frame, good focus. There I am, staring at a picture of a rainbow filtered through my cell phone. In the meantime, I'm missing the masterpiece by

¹ Lisa Wolfe, October 22, 2023, [workingpreacher.com](https://www.workingpreacher.com). Found at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-29/commentary-on-exodus-3312-23-6>

² Transfiguration story is found in various Gospels, here in Matthew chapter 17: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A+1-6&version=NRSVUE>

not witnessing it directly. Then can you recall the resulting photo that came from all your fussing? It is never even close to the original wonder of that oh-so-brief wondrous sight.

The Buddhist tradition of Sand Mandalas always seems amazing to me. Buddhist Monks create these magnificent pieces of art with coloured sand that can take weeks to create. Then, there is this very ceremonial, very intentional, dismantling of the entire mandala, and the sand is all reclaimed – all to remind Buddhists of the impermanence of life and experience.

The “Jesus experience” was like that for his friends. After the intimacy of his encounters with people, he was suddenly gone. But the greatest experiences of Christ were the post-resurrection Christ-experiences, in an upper room, along a road to Emmaus, on a beach, sharing breakfast with the fishing folk.

In the frustrations of life, the times of fear and grief, these theophanies – these wondrous moments Holy Magnificence – are opportunities to just be present in the moment. Not snapping a selfie with it or trying to understand it. Just to feel the wonder and be grateful.

That gratitude and wonder is what we need to face again the frustrations, the fear, the grief of life, and to remind us that God goes with us as we love this broken world, and care for it as the hands, the voice, the healing presence of Christ. Amen.