

“We Meet God”

Mark 9:2-9

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Hope. Fear. Amazement. Uncertainty. We could make a long list of feelings that the disciples likely had this day.

After all, they had left their lives to follow Jesus. And we continue to wonder how much they knew, how much they understood, what they really signed on for.

Over the time they had been together they had not only borne witness to the amazing work of Jesus, but they had been invited to do the same work on his behalf. They had seen how people were drawn to him, how crowds of people wanted to be near him. They had seen the group of his followers grow. And meanwhile, they were also aware of the tension and the conflicts between Jesus and the authorities.

To top it off, in recent days Jesus had been talking more about his suffering...about how following him meant losing your own life...about God’s realm coming in its fullness, but not without struggle.

So, as these words and these events kept running through their heads, I suspect these three disciples - John, James, and our beloved Peter - I suspect they may have felt some relief when Jesus invited them to step apart from the daily routine, to go up a mountain, to leave the demands of the crowds, the tension with the leaders, the hard work that had become their lives.

Likely not really knowing what they were going to, I still can’t help but be convinced that they went with some eager anticipation, even if it was only for a little break.

And yet they got much more than that up the mountain.

There we are told that some special guests joined them. These were not just any guests. For one thing, friends, these were dead people. Moses and Elijah...they were people from history. But ones whose stories and ongoing presence were important to the Jewish people.

I just imagine that there was a moment, not recorded by the gospels, where Peter, James, and John rubbed their eyes, looked questioningly at each other, glanced around to see what other strange things were happening. I just imagine they weren’t quite sure how to respond when this trek up the mountain, likely expected to be a time of quiet contemplation, turned into a meeting place where the wisdom of centuries converged.

Yet, there they were.

And quickly, thanks to Peter, there was an offer to build some tents...to stay longer.

But that was interrupted by another surprise - the voice of God, with words the same and yet different than what had been said at Jesus' baptism. That same voice, one we don't know that anyone but Jesus heard at his baptism claiming, "You are my beloved"...that same voice, now heard by those gathered, was saying to them, "This is my beloved." And, if we fast forward through the story, we understand that same voice calls each of us beloved and invites us to continue the work.

See, while we often focus on what happened up the mountain in this story, while we often focus on the mystical and magical sights and sounds of changing appearances and historical people, the reality is that this experience sends Jesus and the disciples back down the mountain, down into the lives of the people, down into the world where joy and pain, success and suffering commingle.

And, as James Boyce, Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Greek at Luther Seminary, writes, "Mark's transfiguration story pulls back the curtain a bit, allowing a glimpse of where this story is going, and in so doing invites us to experience both the climax and crisis of hearing [the] good news" ([Commentary on Mark 9:2-9 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

Because that is where Jesus lived - in the midst of the climax and the crisis and everything in between. And, as followers of Jesus, that is where we live as well.

When we follow Jesus, we have the opportunity to meet God on the mountaintops. Sometimes these are literal mountaintops...places away, places above, places that can't help but inspire awe within us.

And sometimes they are figurative mountaintops...moments where everything seems to come together for good, experiences where the work we have put into fighting for justice finally seems to matter, days when compassion is everywhere we look and it seems like we are one step closer to the fullness of God's kin-dom.

But, when we follow Jesus, we also have the opportunity to meet God in the midst of the crisis. Let's be honest, Jesus along with Peter, James, and John, they were all coming back down the mountain into a time when things would get more turbulent. And yet, God remained present.

So we, too, have the invitation to continue to be aware of God's presence as we go into hard things, whether those are personal struggles or times of fighting for values that seem to have gotten lost in the midst of the polarization and prejudice, the fear and fighting of our time.

Yes, this story of the transfiguration causes us to be awestruck by the unusual. But, Jesus reminds us time and time again that we don't meet God only when Jesus' appearance is changed...but we have the opportunity as followers of Jesus to pay attention and to meet God wherever we are, in all times and places.

In just a few days it will be Ash Wednesday, the start of the season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday we will be reminded of our humanity, that we are dust. On Ash Wednesday we will be reminded of our need to repent, for none of us is without sin. And the Lenten

season will remind us of the very real human experience, not only ours, but the very real human experience of Jesus.

Lent takes us on a ride that vacillates between the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Lent reminds us that it matters that Jesus was fully human, even when his humanity invited pain and death.

And, as we follow Jesus on the way to the cross, we are reminded that in the midst of all of our experiences, God is present. As we acknowledge that we are dust, we are reminded that the Judeo-Christian story begins with God breathing life into dust and humanity being formed. As we confess our sins, we do so with the assurance that God's forgiveness is available and that God is always waiting for us.

Friends, Jesus reminds us that whether on the mountaintop or in the most difficult of struggles, God remains with us. And as followers of Jesus, we not only meet God, but we are called to share the light and love of God with the world. May it be so.