

Dazzled
Matthew 17:1-8
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
February 23, 2020
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I love this story. But sometimes I forget that. Or sometimes I am just hesitant to admit it.

After all, I, like you, have been raised in this scientific era. I have been raised to ask hard questions and to look for proof. I have been raised to be suspicious of things that seem magical or just unreasonable. I have been raised to have a healthy dose of doubt. I have been raised to look for explanations when something occurs that just can't be explained.

So, stories like this one – with dead people showing up, and with Jesus' face shining like someone flipped a light switch on – stories like this can make us nervous.

But, when I live with it for a while, I am reminded how much I love this story.

Because, if we are willing to set aside our need to understand and to explain, if we are willing to not worry about the measurable facts of the story but instead to embrace the Truth that lies within it, then this story is not only mystical but it is amazing.

Here are three of the disciples. They have been invited to go up the mountain with Jesus. It may not have been their first time and we can suspect that they knew that when he needed to be refreshed he took time out and spent it with God.

It's hard to know how they went up that mountain. They surely realized it was an honor to be invited. And they knew how amazing Jesus was. In fact, just in the previous chapter Peter had declared Jesus the Messiah.

And yet, for as amazing as it was, life with Jesus was also sometimes exhausting. John had just recently been killed. People were following Jesus everywhere and they didn't just hang out...they asked things of him. The authorities were challenging him. And Jesus was starting to talk as if his time were short.

It may be that the disciples were glad to go up the mountain just to be with Jesus, or because they thought it meant they might get a little break. And it is equally as likely that they were so exhausted they didn't even want to make the trek.

But they went and they got an amazing surprise.

Have you ever had that happen? Have you ever gone somewhere – maybe even dreading it – only to find that the greatest gift was waiting for you? Perhaps it was the gift of a relationship – love at first sight on a blind date or a friend met on a difficult day at work. Perhaps it was a gift of a more spiritual nature – an encounter with God in the midst of a painful experience, or just the gift of God's presence when you would rather not have taken time out for quiet and prayer.

I don't know what the disciples were expecting, but what I do know is that they got so much more. They got such a gift that they wanted to put up tents, to build houses, so that they could just stay there. They received the gift of God's presence in a new and wonderful way.

But that gift wasn't meant for the mountaintop. The mountaintop wasn't where they were called to live. Rather, to the contrary, when they offered to build houses not only did Jesus refuse, but Moses and Elijah disappeared. The disciples had a calling that was down the mountain.

Yes, they were invited up...they were invited into an amazing experience...they were invited to see people and things they could only dream of. But that wasn't where they were to live. Rather those experiences were exactly what sent them down the mountain.

There was work to do down in the world where others lived their wonderful, messy lives. There were people who were needing, asking, expecting things. There was danger and risk to following Jesus and living in his ways. These things all remained true. And yet, there was surely new purpose in their step. Because the experience on the mountaintop reminded them that there was something bigger, that there was a power stronger than their own skills or will, and that they were sent into the world to make a difference.

So it is for us. If we are paying attention we will notice that we are gifted with wonderful moments of encountering God. But the highs of those encounters aren't where we live, rather they fuel us as we go into the world to do God's work. Amen.

This sermon was prepared for worship around the tables. Following the sermon participants shared a meal and discussed the following questions:

- *What do you notice in this scripture?*
- *What lesson do you hear in today's scripture?*
- *Have you ever had a "mountain top" experience with God? Were you able to carry something with you into your "regular" life?*
- *What work does God call you to in the world?*