

Spotlights on mountaintops -- Ghostly Bible characters kibitzing -- The voice of God making yet another grandiose and booming appearance --

Now, do you and I need much more evidence to suggest -- that the writers of the Synoptics also went through their own phases of experimentation with mind-altering substances?

Is it any wonder that one of them, John, would go on to write that far-out and far-fetched book we call "Revelation" -- as he day-dreamed on that secluded island -- cooking up something more, perhaps, than just another psychedelic tale?

But we won't go there -- after all this is church -- And after all, we have another place to go -- You and I are going up the mountain!

Where we join Peter and James and John -- higher and higher we climb -- to encounter a Living God.

Peter and James and John will witness a transformation that will transform them -- And before we leave this place -- you and I might just do the same thing.

"Six Days" -- those are the first two words of this morning's Gospel reading.

Six days have elapsed since the last notable revelation of God's identity to these disciples -- at the site of another mountain in Ceasarea Philippi -- when Peter uttered those infamous words, "Yes Jesus, you are the Christ."

And this morning we find ourselves here -- Six days later -- That's the number here in Matthew -- Mark says 'six days' in his version of the same story -- And Luke tells us "about 8 days" -- Six days, six days, and "about eight days"

Can we guess which Gospel writer was the Gentile?

Of course it was exactly six days -- because what do good Jews do on the seventh day?

They walk down Greenfield Road on the Seventh Day, don't they?

This is where we spot our good neighbors every Saturday -- in black suits and white shirts walking to the Synagogue and their own version of Mr. Tabor -- to join others in their quest to see God -- and perhaps joining Peter and James and John in wishing -- especially in inclement weather -- that they could take advantage of some sort of public transportation.

Especially as Peter, James and John make their way up -- 10,000 feet, no small climb -- I'd look for the bus too --

It's a long climb for a Sabbath Day rest -- but this is not a Sabbath Day rest -- it is a Sabbath Day quest --

They are looking for meaning and purpose -- and, just like you and me, they believe that following Jesus will take them there.

"Mountains and Valleys"

Epiphany Last, RCL-A, Sunday, February 3, 2008

Once Peter and James and John arrive they probably have no idea that they are in for such a Mount Rushmore-ian razzle-dazzle light show. -- (Anybody ever seen that, wonderful isn't it?)

And that's just what happens once the disciples arrive at the top.

All of a sudden the spotlights come up -- the players appeared -- and order is called -- "Attention, attention, it is another chapter meeting of the Dead Prophets Society." -- Moses, Here. -- Elijah, Here, -- Robin Williams? Oh, skip him...

But we do have these two -- Moses -- symbolic of the Law -- And we have Elijah -- symbolic of the Prophets -- The Hebrew Scriptures tell us these are the two great leaders who had spoken to God on Mt. Sinai.

These are the two great leaders whose expected return is directly linked to the upcoming, Messianic Age.

And these are two of the three Old Testament figures who did not allegedly die -- ok, Moses did die, but Deuteronomy 34:6 says "no one knows where he was buried" -- which by the first century, had spring into the belief in his 'assumption'-- No, Mother Mary, you were not the first one...

So, we have Moses and Elijah and Jesus -- And Jesus is getting some advice from trusted advisors -- Like Kwame last week at the Manoojian Mansion -- Don't worry, we won't go there --

But it appears to be a Summit Meeting -- quite literally, we might add -- please excuse the pun.

It is highly symbolic in nature -- for nearly all the major religions -- Islam, Eastern and Asian religions -- use the imagery of mountaintops and brilliant clouds to communicate the presence of God.

And God is there -- a booming voice makes an announcement -- "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

And the disciples are probably wishing at this point that they had worn their "Depends" - - for both Mark and Luke describe these disciples as "Terrified" -- Matthew uses a kinder phrase -- "taken with fear."

Sure, it is due to the supernatural aspect of the event -- But perhaps it's because of that word they just heard -- "Listen" -- As in "Listen to Him."

"Listen." -- In Hebrew it is "Shema" -- And "Shema" means much more than simply listening, which is passive -- but it means to cleave to, adhere to, to completely obey with all one's worth.

It is the injunction of God for these three disciples to do something really scary -- as they are looking for meaning and purpose in their lives -- to put all of their eggs in a basket carried by someone who now looks an awfully lot like Gandalf -- clothed in white doing all sorts of Hollywood-special-effects-type stuff.

Albeit, a good guy -- but a scary guy nonetheless -- because you never know what he has up his sleeve.

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And here we, too, are being asked to Listen -- to cleave to, adhere to, to completely obey with all of our worth.

You and I are being asked to put all of our eggs in that one basket that Jesus is holding. -- You and I are being asked to follow Jesus, whose behavior surprises us -- stuns us -- and yes, even scares us.

"How random!" must these disciples have thought as they stood on that holy mountain. -
- "How random!" have you and I declared a wide variety of events and occurrences that have come our way as well.

Isn't life random? -- The older folk among us -- you must think, some days, as you've lived through the invention of the television, -- the microwave -- and now, the Internet. -- (and if you're Jim McKenzie, the invention of fire)

Can life get any more complex, congested and confusing?

If you and I have ever thought that that's what our lives are like -- when we go to work -- when we go home to tend to the family -- when we open up the paper in the morning -- and observe all the crazyness around us -- Then that's exactly what Jesus is talking to us about this morning.

These disciples sat clueless as this event unfolded -- they had no idea what they were witnessing -- or what it would mean to them down the road. -- They were at an utterly confusing time in their spiritual lives -- we might be too.

So what is it that Jesus comes over and says?

That's why I love Matthew's version of this story -- he's the only one who includes it:

Here's what verse 7 says:

"But Jesus came and touched them saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Whatever it is we are going through this morning -- Whatever is scaring and even mystifying us -- "Boy, my eyes just can't focus like they used to -- and my hands are losing their dexterity." -- "I'm at my wits end with my sister who can't stop bugging me -- or that guy in the next office who is so rude to me."

"I really have no idea how I am going to ever start saving money again -- don't even talk about recession -- when will the 'good times' return?" -- Whatever is going on in our lives that is keeping us terrified, -- taken with fear, and curled up in a ball of apprehension and worry --

Jesus' words to us are clear -- "Get up and do not be afraid."

"Follow me" Jesus says -- "I will take care of you -- "I will never leave you -- "Come, down the mountain -- to do the work we are called to do."

My brothers and sisters, we are held in the palms of the hands of someone we know, who has and will give His very life for us.

It's a life of loving sacrifice that you and I just can't believe -- and we want so much to imitate it!

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We would love to be that considerate!

We too want this kind of transformation -- that's what we prayed in our Collect moments ago -- that we, "may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory."

We too want to be transformed -- and be strengthened to bear our cross.

Whoa, what's all this bearing our cross business?

I thought Jesus came so I could be healthy, wealthy and wise?

No, Jesus came to give us some more important things -- like the supernatural ability to help heal the world.

As we well know -- what Peter and James and John did after this experience -- was to head down the Holy Mount -- They travelled down that treacherous "road to Jerusalem" that will end in a cross -- scratch that -- It will end in Easter victory -- and we must never forget that.

Jesus came not so much so we could get a life -- but so that we could give a life.

And there are several parallels between the Transfiguration and Calvary that show us that:

On the Holy Mount, Jesus is surrounded by Moses and Elijah.

On the cross, Jesus is surrounded by two criminals.

On the Holy Mount Jesus' clothes shine with the glory of heaven

At the cross, soldiers gambled over Jesus' clothes.

On the Holy Mount we heard the Lord say this is "God's Son."

At the cross, mockers will snicker as they say, "Ya, this was God's Son..."

The Transfiguration gave these folk the heavenly strength to handle the world's insults.

For we know how the story eventually ends -- God wins --

But we need the strength of this vision to carry us through.

The Transfiguration was the pep rally before the big game -- It was the glossy photograph of the girlfriend for the GI in the trenches -- And it is our hope for the rest of our lives.

It makes us wonder, do we even know how powerful this gift is -- Do we really suspect that God is sharing this power with us here at St. David's -- and that it is showered upon us every time we kneel at that communion rail -- extend our hands and say "Yes" to Jesus and Jesus' call to us?

Writer Annie Dillard asks:

"Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke?

"Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

"The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, --"mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

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"It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; "we should all be wearing crash helmets!

"Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; -- "they should lash us to our pews!

"For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense, -- "or the waking God may draw us to where we can never return."

It's scary -- But it's real -- It's God's presence with us.

And this is the kind of power that has drawn the Parks family here this morning -- Patreece and Darwyn are here with their family in their Sunday best with little baby Darwyn --

And they have come to have him baptized -- they have come to touch this power in the most tangible way the Church knows how -- through the waters of baptism.

It is through putting ourselves to death -- the washing away of the 'old' person -- and arising to newness in Christ.

And we thank you baby Darwyn for reminding us about this power -- it is the power to transform us into the Jesus people we are called to be.

Not long ago I read about a fascinating experiment performed by some social scientists- (New Yorker, Aug 7 & 14, 2006)

They took a big bowl of M & M's and put it on a table in the lobby of a busy apartment building. -- And next to the bowl, they put this little scoop.

After a week, they measured how many M & M's people had taken --

And these social scientists then replaced the little scoop, with a bigger one.

When the scientists came back a week later -- they had found that many more M & M's were missing.

It seems that when people had a bigger scoop, they took more M & M's -- which were free anyway -- When people had a perceived opportunity to take more, they did.

In 3 days, you and I will begin that pious season that the Church calls "Lent."

This 40-day period is the Church's bigger scoop.

We will do the same things our religion asks us to do all year round -- pray more, give more, study more, help more people.

Except, during Lent we have a bigger scoop --

On Ash Wednesday we will hand out devotional books -- we will hand out mite boxes and Lenten folders --

Next Sunday we will start a Lenten class -- we will probably see more of each other at our Tuesday, 7am chapel service.

A bigger scoop sends the message that we are supposed to take more M & M's -- Lent sends the message that we're supposed to take more of Jesus.

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We're supposed to take more time to get closer to God's program in our lives.

What's God up to in our lives? -- How seriously are we contemplating who we are and what we're doing?

The answers lie in doing what the disciples did in our Gospel story. -- Follow Jesus. -- Up the mountain -- and down the mountain.

To exalted glory -- to the cross -- and to Easter victory.

Be not afraid, for Jesus is leading us.

Amen.

Lessons:

Exodus 24:12-18,

Psalm 22,

2 Peter 1:16-21,

Matthew 17:1-9