

Mark 9: 2-8

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

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“Little Windows of Glory”

Imagine: Jesus asks *you* to trek up the mountain with him. There’s Peter, James and *you*. So you lace up the boots, grab a hiking stick for support and trudge your way up the mountain with Jesus. When you get to the top, you look out. See all the tiny houses below—chimneys puffing. See all the trees lining the perimeter. Look down and there’s a hawk soaring in circles below you scavenging for a meal. There you are taking in the glorious sight, when you turn and notice Jesus has lit up. His clothes are whiter than a Tide commercial. He is chatting it up with two old dudes who have long beards. One of them is holding a stone tablet and a staff, while the other has shaggy dread locks with a leather belt around his waist. Then from out of nowhere a thick cloud descends on top of you. It becomes so humid that your clothes are sticking to the body like wet Kleenex. And to bring the moment to a dramatic climax, God’s voice speaks “This is my beloved, listen to him.” In a flash, it is over—life is back to normal. Now comes the question: what sense can you make of it?

Perhaps we begin by consulting the experts. There are plenty of theologians with theories out there. Some say it’s about the characters: Moses is symbolic for the law, Elijah is there to represent the prophets, and Jesus, naturally, is the Messiah who outranks them both. Others say we need to pay attention to the details: six days, an illuminated figure, a desire to build a tabernacle, a cloud, a voice. All of it points backwards to when Moses ascended Mt. Sinai where he received the commandments. Some say the moral of the story is that we need a moment of mountainous affirmation to strengthen our courage before we climb down the hill into the real world where our work remains to be done. Others say, and this one’s my favorite, that it is better to keep our mouths shut in the presence of holiness than to blurt out something foolish

like Peter does. All of these interpretations are trying to figure out some way of making sense of what the luminous, mystical encounter with Jesus actually *means*.

But perhaps that's part of the problem. Maybe our approach to figuring out what the transfiguration means is backwards. Most of us have been taught that the bible's letters, poems and stories hold some basic meaning or moral instruction for us today. If we can only peel back its layers like an onion, then maybe we can get into the core of the meaning. And while this *can be* true, we end up treating scripture like an intellectual exercise that needs to be decoded, when sometimes the stories aren't asking us to make sense of them. Instead, they are inviting us to enter into them, to encounter them, to stand in awe without procuring any answers. Perhaps, the story doesn't make sense, not because it is two-thousand years removed, but because it has never made any sense—not to the disciples, not to the early church and not even to an educated bunch like ourselves.

I mean, think about it: how often does a revelation with God actually make sense? Remember Jacob's dream with the ladder where angels are climbing up and down between heaven and earth? What does he say? "Surely God was in this place, and I didn't realize it." Why didn't he realize it? Because it doesn't make sense! Or what about Moses who has a long conversation with a burning bush in the desert? The bush tells him to tell mighty Pharaoh that it's time to let God's people go or else. Sure, that makes sense! Joshua marches around the gates of Jericho seven times and the walls come down. A virgin gives birth at Christmas. St. Paul on the road to Damascus gets blinded by a bright light. The disciples are scratching their heads on a mountaintop where Jesus's clothes shine with a stained-white radiance. Is it just me, or does God's revelation not make any sense?

So it's no surprise that in Peter's befuddlement, he blurts out the first thing that comes to his mind. "Master, it is good for us to be here." But I wonder if Peter's response is more astute than we give him credit for. You see, the word used here for "good" is the Greek word, *kalos*—which more appropriately means "beautiful." When God created the light, God called the light *kalos* or "beautiful." When God creates us, God call us *kalos*, *kalos!* or "very beautiful!" When Peter blurts out the sentence he says, "Master, it is *kalos* for us to be here." *It is beautiful for us to be here.*

When the Holy Spirit fills this room, we rarely can make sense of it. But it is *beautiful* for us to be here. Or when one of our children says something bright and brilliant as they explore their faith during the Time with All Disciples, it is *beautiful* for us to be here with them, isn't it? Or I think about Dick Patterson who, as a pediatric oncologist, would hold an annual picnic at his cabin home in the mountains for parents who lost their children to cancer. In the terror of their sorrow and isolation, there was space for their grief to be shared as a holy community. I imagine they felt that "It was beautiful for us to be there."

All of these experiences are little windows into God's glory. Glimpses of heaven's beauty—of heaven's *kalos*—right here on earth and we get to witness to it.

I was visiting a woman who was at the end of her life. Hospice had been called, and the nurses had just left after taking her blood pressure. She was very hard of hearing, so I had to get close to her ear and shout. It made me quite uncomfortable to do so, but I got close and yelled in her ear: "You are a beloved child of God!"

She just looked up at me and said, "What???"

"I said you are a beloved child of God!"

Her head suddenly drifted upward as she gazed off into the corner of ceiling as if she was peering into another world. Then she said excitedly, "I can see you Jesus! I just can't get to you yet!"

After her eyes adverted downward, I didn't know what to do so I clumsily asked, "So you saw Jesus, huh! What does he look like?"

She said, "What???"

"What does Jesus look like?"

"Oh, he is beautiful! So full of light!"

To be honest, I wasn't sure I believed her—my mind was turning over all the neurological possibilities, making sense of all that could impede her acuity. *But then I saw her smile.* It beamed with the radiance of pure joy. Friends, no Colgate teeth whitener could have made a smile so bright.

They are small glimpses. Little windows of glory. I know it might not make any sense, but I see God's glory right here in you, in the sharing of our faith together. Isn't it *beautiful* for us to be here?