

The Transfiguration of Our Lord  
(B)  
February 22, 2009  
Text: Mark 9:2-9

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I remember one beautiful spring day when I was living in Tacoma. The sun was shining, it was warm and the sky was blue. I was in the back yard playing Frisbee when a friend and climbing partner came by. He said, "Conditions on Mt. Rainier are perfect. You have to go get your gear!" So I did. I quickly dressed for climbing a 14,000 foot mountain, packed everything I needed, and off we went. It was late afternoon by the time we drove up to Paradise. The sun was getting ready to set, and the light was shining across the face of the mountain, giving a pink glow to its upper reaches. We strapped on our crampons and put on our packs, grabbed our ice axes and roped up and got ready to climb.

So as the sun was beginning to set we trudged up, our boots crunching on the icy crust of the snow, our breath freezing in the cold. Our plan was to start from Paradise and climb up the Muir Snowfield, and spend the night at Camp Muir, a little shelter at about 10,000 feet. Then we'd get up before dawn and make an early start toward the summit. That way we could get to the top and back down before the sun really started to warm the face of the mountain, and before any chunks of ice or rock began to fall.

It had been dark for a couple of hours or more by the time we arrived at the shelter. We could tell right away that we weren't alone in thinking that it was a good day to climb. Every bunk in the shelter was occupied, and there were a bunch of climbers sleeping outside in sleeping bags on the snow. So we rolled out our bags and crawled in to catch a few hours of sleep before starting our climb. By then it was really quite dark, with just a sliver of moon above, and even though the stars seemed to fill the sky, it was only the pure whiteness of the snow that made it possible to see anything at all.

When I woke up, the sun was beginning to peek over the shoulder of the mountain. I stood up and looked out over the most amazing, beautiful expanse of ice and rock. On my left were the Cathedral Rocks, a ridge stretching down to the east and south. And towering over them was Little Tahoma. Below me the Muir Snowfield led down to the Paradise Valley, and in the distance I could see Mt. St. Helens and even Mt. Hood. It was such a striking change from the night, when I couldn't see more than a few feet. Now it felt like I could see everything. And it was a wonder. Even though I'd climbed on and around those mountains dozens of times before, what I saw took my breath away. I just wanted to stay there and soak it all in. It wasn't just "the mountains." It was a whole world bright and alive. Even now I have a hard

time putting into words what I saw. I think I would need to be a poet to tell you.

Our gospel story for this morning is also about a mountain and seeing, about light and wonder and vision. But it's a strange and mysterious story. Jesus takes three of his followers to a mountaintop, where his appearance is changed. Jesus shines with light, and the voice of God announces that Jesus is God's own beloved Son. All outward appearances are stripped away, and Peter and James and John see Jesus for who he is—far more than a teacher or healer or leader. He is the Son of God, the mystery of divine glory in a human body. The disciples are given to see something so amazing and true, that in this brilliant light, the disciples recognize Jesus for who he really is.

It's a profoundly strange and mysterious story. And I don't want to try to explain it away. Instead I want to suggest that there is something at least as mysterious happening right here, happening in our lives. And when the light is shining, and our eyes are open to it, we can see it. We can recognize the amazing truth about who we are and what God is up to in us and through us.

The Bible speaks about us, the community of God's people, as the body of Christ. And it's much more than just a metaphor that says we're a body together and we belong to Jesus. It's who we are. Being a Christian doesn't mean having sins forgiven so we can go to heaven when we die. It means being rescued by God from everything that would diminish life, so that we can now be part of God's great work of love to restore and heal the whole of creation. That's the work Jesus began—to embody God's love and God's unbreakable commitment to this world. And even though the government authorities and the religious authorities rejected him and his way of forgiveness and acceptance and humility, and they put him to death, God's commitment to this world remained unbreakable. And God raised Jesus from the dead—but not as an individual to pick up where he left off. Jesus is no longer limited by a single human body. Now, we—and the people of God in every time and every place—have been made part of Christ's life. You are the body of Christ.

On a mountain, up above the clouds, where the light shines so intensely, it feels like we can see forever. And in our lives—individually and as a community—when the light is shining and our eyes are open to it, we can see how things really are. I can see it. In simple gestures of compassion and hospitality, I see Jesus is present to continue his work through you. In the hard work of finding a way to forgive someone who has done you wrong, I see Jesus is present to continue his work through you. In the commitment of parents and grandparents to raise children whose lives are shaped by love, I see Jesus' work being done. In service given to feed the hungry or care for neigh-

bors in need, in every effort to build community and strengthen the connections between people, I see Jesus' work being done. In the grief and suffering you share because you love others, I see Jesus. Can you see it?

The light is still shining, so that we can see Jesus also, so that we can recognize that he is present here, in you, in us. You are the body in which Jesus is still at work healing and renewing all of creation. You are the body of Christ. We've been given this amazing adventure to share, of being joined to Christ's resurrection life, a life that begins now, and will be brought to completion in the presence of God.

That spring day on Mt. Rainier, we didn't make it to the summit of the mountain that day. Conditions began to change, it was warming up too quickly, so that too soon rocks and chunks of ice would begin peeling off the face of the mountain, and we decided it would be safer to try again another time. So it would have to be another day that we'd be able to stand there at the highest point looking over all of God's creation bathed in light. And often that's how it is for us as followers of Jesus too. Those pure moments of insight and revelation are rare. We may not see the fullness of Jesus' work in our lifetime. But through the witness of scripture and maybe even through our own experience, we have glimpsed the amazing reality of how things truly are. We have been made part of God's great work of love to make this world whole; we have been made part of Jesus' resurrection life, so that we can live without fear, trusting that God's purposes for us and for this world are good. We have been made part of this community where Jesus is alive, and is working in our lives, and through our lives. Oftentimes it's hard to see. But sometimes, when the light shines, you can see everything. Thanks be to God. Amen