

Transfiguration of our Lord, A
Exodus 24:12-18
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

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A friend of ours bought a small piece of land out in the middle of nowhere. On his days off he likes to just go out there and wander around, and what he most loves is paying attention to birds. He's begun to notice different species arriving in different seasons. This land is on the Pacific flyway, which is a major migration route. , a kind of bird highway in the sky. Our friend just spends his time noticing and wondering: *How beautiful those birds are flying in flocks! Wow, some of these birds came all the way from South America! How do they know when to start migrating? How do they know where to land, when they're flying so high up?* His days tramping around outdoors are great for his mental health – they open him up to wonders far beyond himself. They open him to mystery.

Spending time in nature, we often end up in awe of forces beyond ourselves. Visiting the Columbia River Gorge is amazing, and even more so when we learn how it was created. First the land was built up through ancient volcanoes erupting millions of years ago. Then at the end of the last ice age, around 20,000 years ago, a series of immense floods carved a canyon through the basalt rock. They are called the Missoula floods, and they came from a huge glacial lake in what is now Montana. When the glaciers were melting, this enormous lake would fill up higher and higher, until finally the ice dam would break and send massive waters raging up to 80 miles an hour across hundreds of miles to the ocean. This happened over and over, there were at least 40 Missoula floods over thousands of years, scouring through rock with power we can't imagine, creating the Gorge. Amazing!

Today there are continual reasons to be amazed by nature's power, as the Gorge gradually recovers from the Eagle Creek Fire 5 years ago. Vegetation creeps back, the land is healing, wildlife returning. We see the hand of our Creator, still creating. It's amazing!

In even the tiniest living things we find amazement and mystery. Martin Luther once said: *"If you could understand a single grain of wheat, you would die of wonder."*

Wonder and mystery are essential to faith. At all times we are surrounded by forces greater than ourselves, and the greatest force of all is the Reign of God arriving – the movement of God's healing, liberating power which is setting this world right and calling

all people into God's life of love and forgiveness, peace and generosity, courage and hope.

The disciples were firsthand witnesses to God's greater forces, that day Jesus was transfigured. They saw a flash-forward to Jesus's resurrection body -- made of light, the full, shining glory of God. It was no ordinary teacher they were following-- Jesus was God in the flesh. In Jesus, the Reign of God was moving forward at light-speed, drawing everyone into a new life of justice, liberation, and healing. Generous, all-inclusive love was being unleashed to set free all people in every place and time and culture. *(Ronald Allen, workingpreacher.org)*

There was an incredibly beautiful moment on that mountain – Jesus touched them. The disciples fell down, scared to death, but then Jesus touched them and said “Don't be afraid.” And when they stood up, Jesus was himself again, everything was the same as it was before – but those disciples could never be the same again. Now they were marked by wonder and mystery. They would go down the mountain to all of life's brokenness and struggle and damage, but they would never completely forget the light and love of God that keeps on shining everywhere, at all times, if only we could see it. And maybe that was the whole point of the vision—to awaken them to wonder, and awaken us too. *(Eric Barreto, workingpreacher.org)*

Their calling as disciples, and ours too, is about being awake to human struggles, and at the same time being awake to God's glory. Awake to God's mystery. Awake to the wonder of God's presence with us every day.

This story is a wakeup call, a reminder that our life stories are never only human – they are also divine. There is so much more happening than what we readily see. God is alive everywhere in this world. God is always speaking. God is always loving every creature of earth. God shows Godself to humans, and even to us, in mysterious ways. We walk on holy ground every day, because we walk with God.

A friend told about going hiking with an acquaintance who displayed an amazing sense of wonder and curiosity. This man was just interested in everything, from bugs to trees. He really was like a kid, he had a kind of childlike awe and delight. My friend asked about this. And his hiking companion explained that he had to re-learn wonder as an adult. He grew up in an alcoholic home where circumstances didn't allow him to be a carefree kid, but now as an adult he made it a priority to practice wonder. He treasured the opportunity to cultivate joy and wonder as part of himself.

It makes me believe that wonder can become a greater part of each of us. Wonder at this beautiful world, wonder at the experiences we have each day, wonder at God.

For example, what would happen when we approach human beings with the same sense of wonder some people bring to the natural world? How will it change the way we listen to each other... and appreciate each other's life stories? I suspect that when we really pay attention, we'll be struck with awe at how God's goodness is manifest in people. How God's Reign is showing itself, growing itself, even today.

I have often been awestruck by the power of human love. A parent's devotion to their child. The devotion of grown children to their aging parents. Loved ones helping each other through illness and struggles. I've been awestruck by the power of honesty and humility and forgiveness to heal divisions. Awestruck by truth-telling and how it changes things in relationships and communities.

And I've often been awestruck by the courage and clarity of people who fight for justice at personal cost. I'm truly amazed by how tenacious advocates can be, insisting on compassion for vulnerable people, fueled by a vision and commitment that's deeply a part of them.

Amazing things are happening everywhere and at all times. The forces of God are transfiguring our world, reminding us that we are in God's hands, and not only our own. Are we open to the mystery?

Bishop Laurie posted a quote on Facebook not long ago, after what she said was a hard week – she didn't say why, but in our changing times a lot of churches are facing tough challenges. It's hard when you love the church, but you can't fix things. Yet Bishop Laurie reminds us that God is in all of this, somehow. Her post was a quote in colorful font:

“Daily pledge: I will not suck the mystery out of this miraculous and magical world with my demand to know and understand everything. I will have faith. I will rest in the fact that something much bigger than me is holding this beautiful [crazy] show together and in the end, Love wins.”

We can't understand everything, but let's understand this: God is part of whatever we are living through. And in the end, Love wins.

So many times, God is simply more than we can grasp. God moves in mysterious ways. If we lose our capacity for wonder and mystery, we lose an important part of ourselves and our faith.

Even here, this morning, God's wonder and mystery are present in such ordinary ways, in ordinary things some people might be tempted to take for granted. God is present in homemade bread and store-bought wine. Our Savior is right here with us in white grape

juice and gluten-free wafers -- and in whatever forms of bread and wine the Spirit has made available to our worshippers at home. As we come to the Table of Christ, the divine promises of ancient times come to life right here. The Jesus of the mountaintop is with us here and now. In this meal we are connected body, mind and spirit with God who made us and loves us always. In this meal we are connected body, mind and spirit with the Creator who is bringing the Reign of love and justice, healing and truth, forgiveness and generosity and peace, right now and always.

Today God invites us to take this promise into ourselves. To taste and see that God is good. To enter the mystery and abide in wonder. Amen.