

Have you heard the story about the child riding his wagon down a hill when one of the wheels fell off and he abruptly came to a stop. The child jumped up and said "I'll be damned!" The Pastor happened to be walking by as this occurred and she said "You ought to not use words like that... What you said was a bad word. When something happens, just say 'Praise the Lord! The Lord's Name be praised!' and everything will be all right." The child grumbled, putting the wheel back on the wagon and climbed aboard to ride the rest of the way down the hill. About 10 yards further, the wheel fell off again! The child picked himself up and as the Pastor instructed said "Praise the Lord! The Lord's Name be Praised!" Suddenly, the wheel jumped up and put itself back on the wagon! AND the pastor seeing this exclaimed "I'll be damned!"

Years ago, my parents had gone out to dinner with another couple for their anniversary, when a Drunk Driver came the wrong way on the Expressway. For the next several months my Father had to learn to negotiate with broken bones, and my Mom who had had a concussion had a longer fight back to normal, as we their children discussed Assisted Care. Afterwards, she would describe "They had been 70 year-olds who still felt like in their 50s and now felt over 100." My father would say, "So, we gave you Power of Health care and Power of Attorney, but we never expected you to use it!"

We are a lot like these stories.

We believe completely in God's miraculous power; we just do not ever expect it to happen to us.

What we describe throughout Advent and Christmas is the Incarnation of God in Jesus: Emmanuel. This is the ultimate Pygmalion epoch, where God the Creator loves Creation so much as to become mortal. Emperor Constantine attempted to explain in the Nicene Creed: Our Savior has two natures, the Messiah is divine, glorious, light of light, very God of very God; AND he is wholly human, like us, begotten not made.

Throughout nearly all of each of the Gospels, Jesus is described in very human terms. Mary Conceived. Jesus was born. At 30 years of age, like all of Judea he went out in response to John the Baptist to be Baptized. He was tempted. He went to a Wedding. He went back to visit his home community. He faced rejection from his family and neighbors. He taught people. He went fishing with others more experienced. He ate and drank and laughed. Jesus was arrested, suffered, felt abandoned and died. If anything, I believe one of the problems brought on in the 20th Century was we tried to emphasize Jesus' humanity too much.

This morning's mountain-top, The Transfiguration, is an epiphany of GOD Affirming Christ's Divine Glory. Different from Greek Myths, Resurrection to Eternal life is not the prize Jesus receives for this great contest that is life and death. Eternity, Divinity, Glory already belonged to Christ, before Jesus' birth. The concepts of "awe and glory" try to encompass all the divinity, power, majesty that is God. In Hebrew, the word for Glory is **KABOD**, literally meaning to be "loaded down with the shiniest most dazzling riches". The aura about God is intended to demonstrate the nearness of God, God's intimacy with us; while at the same time concealing how overwhelmingly awesome God is. If ever you have seen a Medieval, Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox icon, where the face of Jesus or of Mary were beautifully painted on wood, but then the whole of their clothing, their heads, their bodies are encrusted in gold that is the image here.

Throughout the last two years we have anxiously waited for what will come of COVID19...Will we die, will we ever be done, what will enduring this crisis tell us about ourselves? Throughout the last two months, especially the last two weeks, we waited, whether there would now be a war in Ukraine, with Russia against the Allied Nations. Their now having attacked Ukraine, will this lead to Poland, to Belarus, when will aggression stop! Will this be a Military Conflict, or Civilian as citizens of Ukraine rise up? Will this include a Cyber-attack, or a Nuclear one? We live in times of continual change, radical transformations of

our world. The Conflicts in Korea, Viet Nam, Afghanistan, there were no celebrations in the streets to mark when it was over, we just carried on with the next conflict and the next.

The point of the Day of Transfiguration, is this changes everything! Not simply that on top of Mount Tabor, Jesus' clothes turned white; but that from the Beginning in the Garden of Eden, or Crossing the Red Sea in search of the Promised Land, UNTIL this moment atop the Mountain, ALL Creation had lived and died in their generations; BUT from this moment FURTHER, everything will be seen through Christ's death and resurrection. According to Luke, that is why Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus: his Crucifixion and the meaning of his Exodus for Creation. Similar to the two cycles of the Church Year, Christmas and Easter, Preachers divide the Gospels into two parts, His Baptism, The Call of the Disciples, his miracles and healings; versus the latter parts, with miracles and healings and parables all described as "Jesus set his face on Jerusalem", meaning after the Transfiguration what we focus on during Lent is, Jesus saw his purpose in his Crucifixion for us.

Like any good Biblical story, the Transfiguration has 3 parts, climbing up the mountain, the Mountaintop, and coming down afterward.

John Mogabgab was the founding editor of Weavings, A Journal of Christian Spiritual Life which was a special project of The Upper Room Books. Mogabgab describing the Appalachian Trail says that: ***"Mountains rise out of valleys in a massive demonstration of power. Ancient, imposing, solid rock, they permit only a footprint in the topmost layer of dust. Mountains wear a succession of ecospheres, from forests to high meadows, to scrub brush and sheer rock, at times adorned with the lace of snowfields. At high altitudes, air becomes thin and climbing, the human body adjusts in many ways, from increasing respiration, to a change in the PH of the blood, to radically boosting the number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells if traveling weeks to the peak."*** He describes ***"The hardest part is coming to terms with the constant dispiriting discovery that there is always more hill. Being on a hill, instead of standing back from it, you have difficulty seeing what is to come. Between the curtain of trees on every side, the ever-receding contour of rising slope before you, and your own plodding weariness, you gradually lose track of how far you have come. Every time you haul yourself up to what you think must surely be the crest, you find there is more hill, sloped at an angle that kept it from view, and beyond that slope is another and another. The elusive summit continually retreats by whatever distance you press forward, so that each time the canopy parts enough for a view, you are dismayed to see that the topmost trees are as remote, as unattainable as before. Ever you stagger on, what else can mortals do?"***

Description of what took place on the mountaintop is exceedingly brief. Jesus, Peter, John and James prayed, and Jesus was changed before them, transfigured in glory. As the disciples awoke from sleep, they witnessed his GLORY and Moses and Elijah with him. And as Simon Peter tried to say something in response to seeing Jesus with Moses and Elijah, a cloud came over them, and a voice came from the cloud: ***"This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him!"*** Virtually the same words as had been spoken when Jesus was Baptized. The difference being that the disciples heard it this time, but as with many occasions of GLORY, they could say nothing to anyone.

Different from the other Gospels, Luke describes that coming down from the mountain, Jesus finds a man with a son who has seizures something like epilepsy. Now also recall that according to Luke, only the Chapter before: Jesus had given power to the disciples to go out by TWOS to preach and exhort demons, but on this occasion, they did not believe they could, and the disciples were powerless to do anything. And Jesus called the boy, cast out the unclean spirit and healed him, and all were amazed at the GLORY of God.

All of which I take to mean, that it was not enough for Jesus to be a Rabbi; that it is not enough to be a disciple; not enough to belong to a church back home; not enough to be a member of Valley Presbyterian; not enough to be a Deacon or Elder or Pastor; even when you work at the Patio Sale, you still have to believe. Months ago I stopped and spoke with a couple after worship who said “We have been members of every church in every community we have ever lived, do we have to become members? And I responded that they are welcome, you are welcome, but you do not need to become members. Months later, I saw them and said: “We spoke before, that it is not required to be members, but you are here at every opportunity, you are involved in the life of this church, you believe this is your church, if you want to claim this as your church, please know that you are wanted.”

One last thing, because of the Exodus passage. It is said that when Moses came down the mountain having spoken with God, his face shone with glory, so much so that he covered his face when with people. May we look forward to the time when we put on face coverings because our faces shine with the glory of God, rather than from COVID19.