

I had an invitation to see an event at the Winter Olympics. A friend had extra tickets. Guess what I did? Turned them down. Hockey – I wasn't interested. Now if it had been something like the men's short-track speed skating with Apollo Ohno or the women's moguls like I witnessed last night, I would have gone in a heartbeat. And if it had been ice-skating, nothing would have kept me away. But I was thinking about the time away and the hassle of going across the border, and how exhausted I would be, and I'm not really into hockey anyway. And then I was talking with several other clergy friends earlier this week, they were incredulous that I didn't take my friend up on the invitation. Now as I am reflecting on the passage for today, I'm second guessing myself and wondering if there would have been an amazing experience awaiting me if I had gone. Some Olympic moment.

I wonder about that day when Jesus took his disciples up the mountainside. There seems to be evidence that Jesus had his inner circle— Peter, James, and John. But there is also strong evidence that Jesus was highly inclusive. What if the invitation to join him on the hike up the mountain was offered to all the disciples. What if he woke up one morning, and said anyone want to join me on a trek up the mountain? What if some of them said, "Can't I sleep in for one morning? It's a long way up that mountain. You go without me." What if they missed out on that experience, because they weren't awake to how the Spirit was moving? So often, we miss out on the Spirit's movement because we aren't awake or aware enough to notice it.

There's a story about a little boy who was riding his wagon on a sidewalk? Suddenly, one of the wheels fell off. The little boy said, "I'll be damned!" Of course, a minister happened to be walking by, and he said, "Son, you ought not use words like that! That's a bad word. When something happens, just say, 'Praise the Lord,' and everything will be all right." So the little boy grumbled. He put the wheel back on the wagon and started down the sidewalk. About 10 yards farther, the wheel fell off again. The little boy shouted, "Praise the Lord!" Suddenly, the wheel jumped up off the ground and put itself right back on the wagon. The minister saw it all and exclaimed, "I'll be damned."

We are a lot like that minister. We believe completely in God's miraculous power; we just don't expect it to happen to us. What we know in our hearts is that we need God. Need God's presence in our lives. How often do we miss the boat because we either don't accept the invitation, or we don't expect God to show up.

Many years ago Jesus went up high on a mountain. He knew that he was in the last weeks of his life. He could look out from the mountain toward Jerusalem and see the crisis that awaited him. He knew that in Jerusalem he would experience betrayal and denial and death. He also knew God loved him. But now in these moments on the mountain, he needed to connect with God. Jesus needed what we call a mountain-top experience. I believe we all need mountain-top experiences. We need them to connect with God, not only for the crises we face in our lives, but for the sheer joy of living as well. Marsha Sinetar wrote a book entitled *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics*. Such a quest should be part of the Christian life. In focusing too much on Jesus' transfiguration, we may fall into the trap of implying that only certain persons can experience or mediate the holy like Moses, Elijah, or Jesus, or even modern day mystics. Or that most persons cannot attain the same kind of spiritual insights. Perhaps due to the matrix of DNA, spiritual sensitivity, training, and divine gift, certain people perhaps are more "permeable" to the movements of the ever-present, ever-active God, than others.

But, this does not exclude the rest of us from seeking to experience God in life-transfiguring ways.

In today's scriptures, Jesus and Moses are "set apart" by their encounters with God. Indeed, Luke's transfiguration narrative implies that Jesus belongs to the tradition of spiritual leaders, such as Moses and Elijah. We are called to be encounter and to share in this spiritual adventure with the holy. From this perspective, the church is called to be a laboratory for spiritual experiences, a place where persons expect God to "show up" in their lives in life-changing ways. There is a spiritual continuity between Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and us, and that continuity is found in God's presence in every moment and encounter of our lives. We have an invitation to embrace and expand God's presence and light that is always emerging in our lives and our community, even when we are consciously unaware of it. I believe that both Moses and Jesus *practiced transfiguration*, as they journeyed prayerfully to holy mountains, to "thin places" of divine transparency. I believe we can practice transfiguration as well by becoming aware and creating our own sacred times and spaces in the course of our daily lives. We can create, as Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "*an altar in the world*" that awaken us to experiences of the holy.

Transfiguration leads us beyond ourselves to become God's partners in healing the world. These passages invite us to consider our practices of transfiguration. "Where is your holy place? Where is the 'mountaintop' that promotes your personal transfiguration?" "When are your holy times? Do you have times that you regularly devote to prayer, meditation, and retreat?" "In what ways are prayer and mission, spirituality and social concern, connected in your life?"

We all need these mountain-top moments, and they don't have to happen on a mountain top. They can occur in nature. They can happen in a hospital room. Sometimes it comes to us in worship. When we sing, we can feel the power of God fill us in that moment. Or when we come to Holy Communion and receive the bread, or when we hear God's Word proclaimed, we sense the presence of God in a special and awesome way.

We have this deep human longing to experience the transcendence of God? Peter, James, and John got much more than a brief taste. They had one of those intense, ecstatic experiences that might have transformed their lives then and there, except that they didn't know what to do with it when it happened. Peter is just like many of us. We often try to talk our way into understanding, try to process an experience so that we can absorb its meaning and make that meaning part of who we are. Or maybe we do what so many believers have done with a deeply spiritual experience: we try to carve it in stone, build tents, make rules, harden our traditions and say, "We've always believed this way, done it this way, said it this way..." Let's take the experience and make it something we can hold onto, something that won't change, and best of all, something that won't change us, either. I believe that if we accept the invitation, God will meet us. God will come and touch us. And accept the moment for what it is. God breaking through the heavens.