

Mathew 17: 1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

**And he was transfigured before them,
and his face shone like the sun,
and his clothes became dazzling white.**

Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

**Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here;
if you wish, I will make three dwellings here,
one for you,
one for Moses,
and one for Elijah.**

**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them,
and from the cloud a voice said,
“This is my Son, the Beloved;
with him I well pleased;
listen to him!”**

**When the disciples heard this,
they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.**

**But Jesus came and touched them, saying:
‘Get up and do not be afraid.’**

And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

**As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them,
‘Tell no one about the vision until after
the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’**

Meditation

**From the beginning of time people have always been afraid of God...
and it doesn't really matter which God or whose God you are talking about.**

**From the beginning of time, people have believed that if God is happy with you,
if you obey the Laws of God,
you will be rewarded in some version of heaven or another...
and...if you do not obey the Laws of God and God is not happy with you...
well...you know the end of that story!**

**From the beginning of time, people kind of, sort of...
want to be close to God...but only so close,
because, well....God, to speak frankly is scary and an experience of God could be
frightening...
the ancient Jews believed that you could not see the face of God and live...**

**Ancient Jews believed that going up the mountain is where you would go if you were going
to meet God...it is where Moses went when he wanted to talk with God,
or when God wanted to talk with him
so when Peter, James and John are invited to go up the mountain with Jesus
they must have expected some sort of God experience..
I wonder how they felt...where they excited? or where they afraid?
I wonder what Jesus told them about why they were going?
I wonder if they offered excuses why they couldn't go...
did they talk on the way up?
or where they silent trying to appear brave**

**At first, they don't see or hear God...
but they see Jesus full of light and shining...
and he is talking with two of the greatest men in the Jewish Tradition:**

**Moses -who represents the Law-
and Elijah who represents the Prophets.
Then Peter, speaking for the group says to Jesus:
Jesus...this is great! so glad to be here!
Can I build three tents for you and Moses and Elijah...**

**We can understand that!
we always seem to like to build a shrine to commemorate
a special event...**

**Apparently Peter is still talking when suddenly a
bright cloud envelopes them
and a voice from that cloud silences him
and the voice says:
“This is my Son, the Beloved;
with him I well pleased;
listen to him!”**

**and that’s when they hit the ground...
can’t you just see them trembling and hiding their faces?**

**and that is when Jesus steps in...and touches them.
Have you noticed how Jesus always touches people when he heals them.
Perhaps it was a soft touch on the top of their heads...
or maybe a gentle tapping on their shoulder...**

“Peter...James...John...” it’s ok...don’t be afraid.

**Jesus spent his entire life trying to help people not be afraid of God.
He gave his life trying to convince people that God was nothing but love,**

nothing but mercy and forgiveness and compassion...

**Over and over and over again, he preached nothing but the Love of God....
and we still have a hard time believing it.**

**Why does it seem so much easier to be afraid of God's wrath
than to be grateful for God's love?**

**I could say that perhaps it is because of our American:
“pull ourselves up by our bootstraps” philosophy...
but this attitude certainly isn't unique to modern Americans....**

**I could say that perhaps it is because of our traditional Teachings
in the institutional church down through the ages...
but it isn't unique to Christianity...**

**All I can say is that Jesus saw an essential part of his teaching
as trying to dispel our fear of God...
and still we have yet to learned it ...**

**Or perhaps it is because IF we were to accept the unconditional love of God
for ourselves, then we would have to acknowledge God's love
for all those people whom we don't like
or we judge as 'bad'
or all those who we believe will eventually get their 'just reward'.
Perhaps it is too much for us to remember that God loves them as well...
just as much as God loves us...**

**We are currently in the season of Lent...
Franciscan priest Richard Rohr calls on us to adopt a spirituality of Subtraction
during this Holy season before Easter...**

He recommends that we let go of whatever is keeping us from recognizing the presence of God that is all around us and that IS our most truest self...

And so it might be good for us to start with letting go of our fear of God.

Think about it:

why would we ever want to draw close to something or someone that we are afraid of?

Some people think we need to fear God's wrath because what else would keep us along the straight and narrow?

Really???

That kind of thinking does nothing to add more compassion, more kindness or more love into the world...

That kind of thinking doesn't bring more peace into the world...

That kind of thinking is really self-centered thinking

because we only follow the rules hoping that we will be rewarded...

That kind of thinking is really childish thinking...

hoping that we won't be caught doing what we are not supposed to be doing...

Accepting the unconditional Love of God,

opens our hearts and our lives to humility and gratitude...

But for many of us, being humble is hard!

Often times we like thinking we have earned the gift, the blessing...

but to acknowledge that we are already loved

in spite of or perhaps even because of, our limitations and failures...

well...that says much more about who God is than

any trivial comment on how good... or not...we have been.

And when we find ourselves genuinely humble...

we find a deep well of gratitude gushing up....

and find ourselves being more compassionate and understanding of others...

less judgmental, softer and kinder...willing to offer to them the benefit of the doubt...

and find ourselves breathing a long slow sigh of relief...

and then, of course, the only word that we can say is: THANK YOU....

AMEN.