

"When you read the sermon for yourself - try to hear Pastor Paula's tone and pace of speech. This sermon is written to be spoken and may not be grammatically correct. If you would like to hear it go to the UCC Sanbornton YouTube channel any time - search for the date the sermon was given." Pastor Paula

## **Sermon 2.14.21**

### **Transfiguration Sunday**

#### **Mark 9:2-9 "Mountain Tops"**

**Pray with me! God of love and change! May the words that I share be pleasing to you. May we each hear your call! Amen**

It starts off ordinary enough. Jesus and his three closest friends – Peter, James, and John – go up a high mountain. Nothing unusual. Jesus often went off from the crowds to pray and rest. All very ordinary.

But from here on, the ordinary ends. No sooner do they arrive than Jesus is suddenly "transfigured." Transfigured is defined as "being changed to something more beautiful or elevated" The text says "His clothes became so white they shone; whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

And if that is not out-of-the ordinary enough, two of faith's most honored heroes suddenly appear by Jesus' side. Moses, the great law-giver, and Elijah, the prophet *par excellence* – the Law and the Prophets – paying their respect to Jesus, in whom both are brought together. I wondered what was the significance of the visit by Moses and Elijah on that mountain top? I discovered that the popular theory is that Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets. So, when God's voice spoke from heaven and said "Listen to Him!" it was an indication to all that the Law and the Prophets must now give way to Jesus.

As if that's not a big enough event; next a cloud overshadows the mountain. The damp air closes in. Then the voice of God echoes around them saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Glowing face and clothes, visits from famous figures of the past, hovering clouds and heavenly voices. It was so extraordinary that when it was all over, and Jesus and Peter and James and John were headed back down the mountain, Jesus told them to "tell no one about what they had seen." It made sense to the disciples, who would have believed it anyway? But the three of them believed it. They had been there; it was their experience and in those moments on that mountain Peter, James and John too were changed – they would never forget those moments of glory.

This was both literally and figuratively a "mountain-top experience." In the Celtic tradition they are called "thin places" - a thin place "is a place where the boundary between heaven and earth is especially thin. It's a place where we can sense the divine more readily."

These thin place experiences can happen anywhere: in worship, singing, skiing, hiking, doing the dishes, throwing clay on a potter's wheel, watching your children or grandchildren play. Thin places are when we "feel" the presence of the divine and are moved. For me I usually experience the feeling of peace in my chest and want to just enjoy the moment.

I sometimes ask myself why was this story in the bible – what is the purpose of it for us to understand. Some say that this story provided the disciples with a glimpse of who Jesus really was. They had only known him in his human body and

this mountain top experience gave them a greater tangible knowing of Jesus' the divine. It gave them the reassurance they would need and the certainty of who Jesus was so that after his death they had this experience and knowledge to lean on. Jesus changed appearance and shining garments reflect his nature as both divine and human.

Throughout my life, when I'm paying attention, I notice and experience thin places. One time I was visiting a gentleman in hospice and his wife and son were there. I'll call him Steve – he was in his last hours of life. We prayed; his wife holding his hand, his son holding his mom's hand and mine. I was at the foot of his bed so I gently put my hand on his foot. The circle was complete. Soon after I started praying "Steve" opened his eyes, but he was not looking at me, but maybe three feet over my head. He appeared to be slightly smiling to whatever he saw over my head. When we ended the prayer, he went back to sleep. Out in the hall I ask the family if they had noticed the same thing. They glanced at each other and smiled. They told me that four years earlier "Steve's" son had died of cancer in that same room. They were convinced that "Steve" was being visited by his son. For this family it was a "mountain top" experience", a thin place and a moment that forever changed them and gave them a peace they couldn't describe about the death of the son and now the father. Mother and son felt that they experienced not only the presence of a son and brother but also the very presence of God and God's healing peace. Fear of 'Steve's' death was softened to a place of peace for them. Sadness was still heavy. But just like the disciples so long ago, we had the experience together and we were changed, we experienced God's grace and peace.

Peter, James and John, up on that mountain top, had been given nothing less than a glimpse of the divine. For one brief shining moment God had cracked the door and they heard God's voice speak to them!

**“This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him!”**

I wish everyone could experience a ‘thin place’; it would make being a follower so much easier. But we need to be open to them - to notice those moments when they happen and savor them and let them change us.

Jesus is the one on that mountain top who was “transfigured”- he was “changed to something more beautiful or elevated” demonstrating his divine and human nature. Jesus’ baptism was the beginning of his ministry and this event marks the end of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and begins his journey towards Jerusalem.

But, this experience for Peter, James and John was also very important to Jesus’ ministry continuing after his death. For up on that mountain, they too were forever changed. For they had experienced the divine – and once that happens you can’t step away from that deep inner knowing. Whether you call it a mountain top experience or a thin place, these moments are life changing and what we cling to in times of struggle and doubt.

Today I ask you to think about it – what thin place experiences have you had? Send me an email and tell me about it. We don’t often share these special private moments – but you would be surprised at how many experience them!

May we each seek to have a glorious experience of the presence of God in our lives. Amen.