



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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February 11, 2018

GLIMPSES OF GOD

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

The Transfiguration is a difficult story to preach on. To me it seems a weird passage and finding in it what is useful for today isn't easy. Still, I think it reveals something important about our experiences of God, namely what they're about, or to put it better, whom they're about.

Haven't you had experiences of God, or at least some experiences that you think might have been of God? I hope so.

Getting up in the morning in the darkness before daybreak; brewing coffee, taking a cup to Sally; driving to the gym together to workout, neither of us saying much, just reflecting on the day ahead, which hasn't yet revealed what it holds for us; simply feeling gratitude for life, for health, for family, for the quiet beauty of the moon and stars above. All that's an experience of God for me. Somewhere in the very ordinary and routine activities of the early morning, I feel haunted in a wonderful way by a mysterious, very subtle presence in the background of my thoughts, not anything I can see, only something I sense. It's less a feeling of knowing something than a feeling of being known by something, by someone. Maybe I'm just crazy, but it seems real.

Have you had – do you have – experiences like that? Dorothy Day, the famous Christian activist and author, began to believe when she got pregnant. Before that she'd been a communist. She never stopped advocating for the poor, but now her life had a religious dimension. **“I was surprised that I found myself beginning to pray daily...It's hard to say how this delight in prayer grew on me. The year before, I was saying as I planted seeds in the garden, ‘I must believe in these seeds, that they fall into the earth and grow into flowers and radishes and beans. It is a**

miracle to me because I do not understand it. Neither do naturalists understand it. The very fact that they use glib technical phrases does not make it any less of a miracle, and a miracle we all accept. Then why not accept God's mysteries?" So, she did.

The three disciples, Peter, James and John, went up a high mountain with Jesus. This was six days – in other words a very short time -- after Peter said he thought Jesus was the Messiah. But Peter's grasp of the Messiah's destiny was so far very rudimentary. He couldn't understand why Jesus was going to suffer and be killed, and he also had no idea what Jesus meant by his resurrection three days after his death.

Then, as if to confirm his identity as the Messiah, Jesus is transfigured before them. His clothing becomes radiantly white, **"as no fuller on earth could bleach them,"** says Mark. Fullers were the dry cleaners of the ancient world. White is the color of purity and heavenly glory.

Two other figures now appear, Elijah and Moses, and they have a conversation with Jesus, which Luke says was about Jesus' upcoming death in Jerusalem.

The disciples reaction to all this is to become very afraid. Peter probably should have kept his mouth shut, but as one commentator put it, **"Peter belongs to that numerous class of persons, who when they do not know what to say, say it."** So Peter says, **"Rabbi, it's good that we're here. Tell you what! Let's put up three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."**

There are a couple of things wrong with this idea. For one, the suggestion of tents for overnight shelter seems to indicate that Peter wants to extend this mountaintop experience as long as possible, but we can't do that. We have to follow Jesus into the valleys of life, because there is great need there. The first thing Jesus and his disciples will encounter when they come off the mountain is a very sick boy. Had they stayed on the mountain he would never have gotten well.

Lots of young people will go to Montreat or some other conference center this summer and have a ball and have some genuine experiences of God, but then they'll have to come home, home to the stress and tedium of school and work and family life. But the memories of our mountaintop encounters with God stay with us and strengthen us for the hard service we have to render to God in the valleys. And Christ is with us as well, everywhere we go. And the church is with us. On the mountaintop, we get a sneak preview of heaven. In the valleys, the church is called to be a colony of heaven on this troubled earth until the kingdom of God finally arrives.

The other thing wrong with Peter's idea of making tents on the mountain is that he seems to think that Moses and Elijah and Jesus are equal in importance. To correct this misunderstanding, a cloud now overshadows the disciples, and a voice comes out of the cloud saying, **"This is my beloved Son! Listen to him."** Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets of the Old Testament, which predicted the coming Christ, that is, they were about Christ. So Christ is far superior to them. He completes and perfects all that they say about him.

The experience of God, from a Christian perspective, isn't an empty religious feeling. It's God revealing God-self to us in various ways, but ending in the vision of Christ in all his divinity and humanity and humility and love. He's the meaning of life.

C.S. Lewis had numerous experiences from his childhood and as an adult, of something he called "joy," which he said was an intense, unsatisfied desire for something unknown, a desire which is itself more desirable than anything else. **"Anyone who has experienced it will want it again,"** he said.

It was only in later life, after he heard the Christian gospel, that he finally embraced Christ as the one he was seeking in his occasional raptures. How that happened, he said, was a mystery. **"I well know when, but hardly how, the first step was taken. I was driven to (the zoo) one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I**

had hardly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. 'Emotional' is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake."

When Jesus and his disciples started down the mountain, he told them not to talk about what they'd just seen and heard until after his resurrection. He seems to have thought they were not yet ready to proclaim him as the Christ because they wouldn't understand the purpose of his suffering until it was overcome by his resurrection.

At any rate, Jesus is what all of our experiences of God are about – from beautiful sunsets and sunrises and spring days to the births of babies and moving choral music and the radiance of good people. They all point to him. **"This is my Beloved Son,"** says God. **"Listen to him!"** Let's do!