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Exodus 24:12-18 and Mark 9:2-10
“god and God”

Exodus 24:12-18

¹²The Lord said to Moses,
*“Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there;
and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment,
which I have written for their instruction.”*
¹³So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.
¹⁴To the elders he had said,
*“Wait here for us, until we come to you again;
for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”*
¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.
¹⁶The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days;
on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud.
¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire
on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.
¹⁸Moses entered the cloud,
and went up on the mountain.
Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Mark 9:2-10

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John,
and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them,
³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.
⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵Then Peter said to Jesus,
“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here;
let us make three dwellings,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”
⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.
⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Find female voice?)
⁸Suddenly when they looked around,
they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain,
he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen,
until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves,

questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

“god and GOD”

Do you have those places in your life that feel extra-ordinary? Those places, where you feel God’s presence more than others? I have been going to Montreat for over 20 years now. It has been a few years since I have had the opportunity to be there and I can feel it. For me, it is what I would call a THIN SPACE - a place where I experience God’s presence in a very real and palpable way every time I am there. Montreat is in NC, about 20 minutes east of Asheville. It is nestled in a valley surrounded by beautiful mountains. To get there you have to drive up the mountain, and as you go **up** and drive through the Montreat gate, you get the feeling that you are setting yourself apart from the ordinary patterns of life, it feels as if you are moving into extra-ordinary time. Presbyterian groups from all over the country go to Montreat for conferences, retreats and vacations. What draws them to this place, is a deep desire for an extra-ordinary moment of encounter with God’s presence on that mountain.

The mountaintop has long been a place in the history of human yearning where God has been found. Maybe the idea of the mountaintop was planted in our heads by Moses who gathered his courage and retreated to the Mountain of God to receive God’s instruction in the form of the 10 commandments. Jesus who often retreated to the high places for times of prayer and reflection in preparation for or to ground himself after big events in his life. A few weeks ago we saw Jesus retreat to the mountains where he delivered his Sermon on the Mount to his disciples.

Just before today’s reading from Mark, Jesus revealed to the disciples that he was going to suffer the humiliation of being rejected, that he was going to die and be resurrected three days later. Peter rebuked Jesus for saying such things. Peter knew that Jesus was too important to endure such treatment – Jesus has to be protected. Jesus would have none of it... The problem was, Jesus knew that Peter was still not seeing the full picture. Jesus turned that rebuke back on Peter and drew in his other disciples, saying: “Get behind me satan” – Jesus did not want to be tempted to avoid the risk he knew he needed to take in order to show forth God’s goodness and mercy. Jesus used this moment to tell his disciples that they had this problem with holding too tightly to their earthly expectations.

For six days that conversation lingered in Jesus’ mind...I imagine the disciples were yearning for answers, for understanding too. When Jesus told Peter, James and John to come with him for some prayer time in the mountains they jump at the chance, though they had NO idea what was in store for them that day.

More than two millennia later, we still don’t really understand what happened there on that mountain when Jesus’ clothes become dazzling white. Among all the Gospel accounts, Mark’s version of the Transfiguration of Jesus, could be called, “A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration.” It’s the shortest

account, the most sparsely detailed. While something mysterious, dazzling, and revealing does indeed happen, we learn in Mark's beginners guide that **nothing about** the nature of Jesus revealed here is **new**. The divine voice that is heard saying, *"This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"* is the same voice that was heard at Jesus' baptism. "What's different about this event, is that here in the center of Mark's gospel the veil of God's big plan concerning Jesus is lifted and we are given a vision of the past, present and future all at once.

On the way to the future, which holds for Jesus the cross where he will suffer and die, he stands there on the mountain top illumined by the past with Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, the prophet of God. In a glimpse we see the broad scope of God's plan. In a moment we experience the eternal¹."

The Presbyterians who make the trek to Montreat, those of us who go to our "Thin Places" for a sense of connection with God are a lot like Peter, James and John, we are wishing for an experience that would provide us a glimpse of God's plan, we are wishing for understanding that will help us know we are not alone. But when those very moments do come along, when we feel God draw near "we find ourselves afraid, and feeling suddenly **very out of control** we try to domesticate our experience of the Holy by fitting it into a plan²." Like the disciples we want to find ways to build dwellings in that place, to keep the divine there – not here (in our hearts).

I suspect that as much as we want an encounter with God, we simultaneously fear the presence of God because we fear being changed, being transformed. What we have, who we are, may not be everything we want, but at least we know it, we are used to it, have built a relatively orderly life around it. So, when God comes – perhaps not in a transfiguration as dramatic as Mark describes but in the ordinary hopes, encounters, and tragedies of our everyday life – when God comes and unsettles the orderly lives we've constructed we try to put those disruptive experiences back into line by cramming them into a plan.

This is why I think Moses comes down from the Mountain of God with 10 commandments that make it abundantly clear that we are not supposed to worship any other god. When we read Paul's many letters we get the clear warning that the gods (LITTLE g) of this world are the things that block us from seeing the light of Christ already surrounding us, the gods (little g) of this world are those things that distract us from seeing the face of God in the world. The gods (little g) of this world are the things we use to domesticate Christ' radiant light at work in our lives. Our busy schedules, Our important meetings, Our soccer or football or hockey games, Our work schedules or volunteer work... All of those things are about us, about the things we do, but the Transfiguration reminds us that as people of faith we are not about telling the world how great and important we are, we are about creating space in our lives for the Holy to enter in and to show forth through our faces, our hands, our feet, our words how GREAT our God is.

Even the work we do in God's name has not been immune from our attempts to control God's presence in our lives. For too long the church has gone out into the world to serve in the name of God, to carry the Good News out into the world, to provide for the needs we have identified in the world.

Missions expert Miriam Adeney relates a story told to her by an African Christian friend: Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, "Mouse, let's have a party!"

¹From Agnes Norfleet; March 5, 2000 sermon

² David Lose working preacher Blog from Transfiguration 2015 - Mark 9:2-9

Animals gathered from far and near. They ate, and drank, and sang, and danced. And nobody celebrated more exuberantly than the Elephant. After it was over, Elephant exclaimed, "Mouse, did you ever go to a better party? What a celebration!" But Mouse did not answer. "Where are you?" Elephant called. Then he shrank back in horror. There at his feet lay the Mouse, his body ground into the dirt—smashed by the exuberance of his friend, the Elephant. "Sometimes that is what it is like to do mission with you Westerners," the African storyteller commented. "It is like dancing with an Elephant."³

For far too long we have controlled how we experience God in the world which has limited our ability to hear and see Christ already present in the world. We have gone into the world with our minds made up, with a clear list of what needs to be accomplished and how to accomplish it. This has resulted in the church missing the Image of God already present because we have been too busy trying to stick to a plan we created.

But maybe, just maybe, there is no plan. Maybe there's only love. And perhaps our job is to bear witness to God's love already at work in the world, to bear witness and be transfigured by Christ's presence so that others can see Christ in us. Maybe we should be less worried about building booths to make Christ's presence neat and tidy, and be more concerned about standing together in the mystery of God and God's love. Mark's gospel shows us that we are called to the toughest work, we are called to put aside the gods of this world in order to bear witness; to bear witness and to hear the Word of the ONE true God fill the world.

Like Peter and James and John, we are called to stand and witness and then to leave this place as those who have seen God's glory in Christ Jesus. Christ calls us to leave this place and not tell anyone what we have experienced – we should not leave this place to fill the world with words, but rather to leave and fill the world with the Love of God made evident by the way we live each and every day.

Amen.

³Corbett, Steve; Fikkert, Brian; Casselberry, Katie (2014-10-01). Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions: Leader's Guide (Kindle Locations 1151-1154). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.