

“A Kodak Moment”
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Mark 9: 2-9

There are moments in our lives when we feel ourselves in the midst of an epiphany-- a sudden and unexpected manifestation of the divine. These moments can happen anywhere. For Isaiah it was during worship at the Temple; for Jacob while sleeping with his head on a stone pillow; for Moses it was while watching a burning bush; for the disciples it was with Jesus on Mount Tabor as he transfigured before them. These are moments which grip our hearts and minds, but which we find difficult to describe. Their significance can take years to fully understand. In today's lesson the language of poetry and symbol are used to describe such glorious moments, such epiphanies.

Mark 9:2-9

In one of the commentaries this week, the writer views this scene of transfiguration as a paparazzi moment for Peter, but he doesn't have a camera. What to do--what to do-- thinks Peter. I know!! I'll build three booths!!!!

What would we do? We who take pictures of everything of significance in our lives? How many of you would feel naked without a camera or camcorder at any family event or vacation? I know, I too, am guilty of trying to capture trips to Israel and Europe, or family moments through a camera lens. I have boxes and boxes of ones that haven't even made it to the albums yet and I haven't even looked at the ones I took this past week. (You don't have that same problem, do you?)

We mortal beings, for whom life passes so quickly, long to capture the moment to hold onto to it into the future, and ultimately into future generations. But things of the Spirit don't capture well on film. The lighting's all wrong-- too much light, even Divine light causes overexposure. The voice of God does not record well-- too few people are attuned to hear it. And the feelings of awe, wonder and transformation don't show up well on human faces-- we look goofy, or perplexed, or downright boggled. Direct confrontation with the Divine is definitely a personal, “You had to be there” kind of experience.

So how DO WE get there? How can WE be there when the Divine comes to call? Sometimes we need to put ourselves in the right place at the right time. What do I mean by that? Sometimes, I think, we need to go out of our way to let God know that we're interested in some kind of an encounter. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we can make a Divine encounter happen-- only God can do that, but I am saying that we are responsible for developing a relationship with God, of studying scripture, of attending worship, of feeding the hungry/ clothing the naked, of putting ourselves where God is apt to be.

WE, as Christians, need to worship-- to experience all kinds and ways of praising and worshipping the living God, to pray and meditate, to study scripture and the great inspirational works of our faith, to listen to sacred music, to go on retreat or pilgrimage. We need to learn to listen as well as to talk, to wait with expectation in the silence for the still small voice, to watch in the darkness for the light to dispel it.

I know that some of you over the years have journeyed to places where you have experienced life changing moments. For me, most of those experiences have taken place on pilgrimage or sabbatical times. In Israel especially, I have gone to put myself in the thick of God's revelations to humankind. As I walked in Jesus' footsteps throughout the countryside, as I saw the land that Jesus' saw and as I experienced the people and the culture as Jesus did, I had epiphanies of my own. For some of the people I took with me to the Holy Land, there were so many experiences, many, I'm sure, similar to your own: remembering the affirmation of our baptisms while wading in the Jordan River, celebrating the Lord's Supper in a garden outside Jesus' tomb, traveling the old Roman road between Jericho and Jerusalem where a man fell among robbers but was aided by a passing Samaritan, following the path through the Old City that Jesus took on his way to Calvary, praying at the Western wall-- the last vestige of the great Temple, and sitting in a small boat on the Galilean Sea. Some couples renewed their wedding vows in the Church in Cana where Jesus turned the water into wine, many ate St. Peter's fish pulled from the waters where Peter and James and John fished so long ago. These are wonderful experiences to have had, but there are others, equally enriching experiences to be had closer to home.

We do not have to go to Israel, or to go away at all, to experience God in a whole new way-- to have epiphanies or revelations of our own.

In his weekly magazine, *Rumors*, Ralph Milton told this story called, *A story about Christ's transfiguration*. "What Happened, Peter?" Mark asked.

"I can't tell you. Not now," Peter answered.

"Are you OK? You and James and John. You look awful!"

"No, we're not sick, Mark," Peter was shaking a little. "Just leave us alone, OK?"

It was years later when Mark finally heard the story of what happened that day. It seemed like a lifetime ago. Jesus, the one they thought was the Messiah, had been executed like a common criminal. Strung up on a cross. But then he'd come back and been among them. And later, the Holy Spirit came to all of them at Pentecost.

"What DID happen to you, that day on the mountain," Mark asked Peter. "You didn't want to talk about it then."

"I didn't know what it was about then." Peter was smiling.

"Well now that you know, tell me."

"I still don't know anything," Peter said. "But I understand. There's a difference."

"I don't get the difference. But never mind. Just tell me what happened."

"Well, Jesus asked me and James and his brother John to go up with him to the top of the mountain. We thought he was just going to pray. But all of a sudden, Jesus changed. His face shone. It was like looking into the sun. And his clothes turned white. Really white."

“That’s just like what happened to Moses!”
“Yeah,” said Peter. “And then there were two people with Jesus.”
“Who?” asked Mark.
“Elijah and Moses.”
“How did you know?”
“I don’t know how we knew,” said Peter. “But we knew. And Jesus was talking to them.”
“What did they say?”
“I couldn’t hear. And Jesus wouldn’t tell us afterward.”
“So what did you do?” said Mark.
“I didn’t know what to do. I said to Jesus. ‘Shouldn’t we build three little houses here? I could build one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’”
“Why would you want to do that?”
Peter laughed. “Because I can’t think under pressure, that’s why. So I say something dumb.”
“What did Jesus say?” Mark asked.
“He didn’t say anything. A bright cloud came and covered him. Then we heard a voice. James and John heard it too. You can ask them.”
“Was it God?”
“It must have been. The voice said, ‘This is my Son. I love him. Listen to him.’”
“That’s all?” asked Mark.
“That’s all.”
“What did you do?”
“We were so scared. We fell flat on our faces. But then we heard Jesus saying very gently, ‘Don’t be afraid. Get up.’”
Mark was shaking his head. “I don’t get it. Every time I think I understand, I hear something new. But it’s funny, Peter. I hear you tell that story and I feel strong and good and happy inside.”
“Yeah!” Peter was laughing. “I know what you mean. It kinda gets the old spirit dancing, doesn’t it?” (Rumors, 2-21-04)

Friends, the Spirit of God is an awesome, transforming thing. Few of us will ever be privy to the kind of experience the disciples had that day on Mount Tabor. Few of us will be given that clear a vision of eternity. So, we need to relish the glimpses of the Divine when they come. We need to put ourselves in God’s way so we don’t miss anything. We need to open our eyes and our ears for God’s revelations. We need to learn the language of symbols and mysticism in order to explain even to ourselves what we experience. We need to spend less time trying to capture the moment on film, and learn to live in the extraordinary moments when they come.

Milton says: “Perhaps the mountain is what the Celts called a “thin place”. A place where the veil between heaven and earth is thinner- where the barrier between ourselves and the holy becomes permeable.

“Like the Elijah legend, this story also seeps in around the edges of our rationality and helps us understand—no, not ‘understand’—helps us to know, beyond understanding, that the man Jesus encountered God—pleased God. And we are somehow

heirs to that fragile blessing which we store in the clay jar of our souls and our minds—so that in a way, far beyond understanding, we can know the power and reality of that gift.” (Rumors, p.2, 2-21-06)

We, as a faith community, are on our own journey of faith into a new way of being, into a new period of soul-searching, and hopefully, growth. During this Lenten time of study and introspection, I hope that you will find time to put yourselves in God’s way; that you seek God intentionally in prayer, study and meditation. If you have ‘thin places’ nearby, I urge you to avail yourselves of their healing, transforming properties. Some of you may never have thought of your favorite, special places as ‘thin places’ before. In light of today’s reading, I urge you to think about what it is that makes them special. Is it the beauty of nature, the memories of special family moments spent together, or an indescribable feeling of elation? Maybe then this is a ‘thin place’ for you. If you can, go there. If you can’t, find those pictures you’ve tucked away in those boxes or albums. And then remember.

Lent is the time to seek out God. Are we ready to look for those Kodak moments in our lives—those times of insight and inspiration—here and now? What would those snapshots reveal? Let us thank God for the revelations, transformations and divine manifestations that are ours, this day and every day.

Thanks be to God. Amen.