

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

All of us have had mountaintop experiences, maybe not as luminescent or as powerful as the one described in Mark, but all the same, we have had them.

Nicholas Herman had one. At the age of 18, he is driven to join the Carmelites. Upon being accepted, the other monks did not assign him to study scripture but placed him in the kitchen instead in order to provide meals for more than hundred monks.

Every day, Brother Lawrence would say this prayer: "Lord of all pots and pans and things, make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates." As recorded in Canon Logue's book A Season of Healing Lawrence became so aware of God's presence that the distractions proved to be less of a distraction and then no distraction at all. Lawrence put it like this: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer. In the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Supper."

Mountaintop experiences can occur anywhere, even in a kitchen in the midst of pots and pans. Brother Lawrence's "transfiguration" was triggered by a walk on a wintry day.

Maybe not in the kitchen but during a walk that we have done a zillion times or a piece of music from another period of our life causes us to be transported into another time and place and we see the world in a different way; a fragrance that seems familiar but we cannot precisely identify the time or place it is associated with but we know that it was good; or we have a moment, to quote that famous philosopher and NY Yankee catcher, Yogi Berra: "[that's] like "having déjà vu all over again."

For a moment, we are transformed and taken out of our normal routine and transported to another place. As the disciples on the mountain top with Jesus, we need to heed those moments and enter into the experience.

Frederick Buechner, in his book, Secrets in the Dark, describes it this way. He says: "I believe that we know much more about God than we admit that we know, than perhaps we altogether know that we know. God speaks to us, I would say, much more often than we realize or than we choose to realize. Before the sun sets every evening, God speaks to us in an intensely personal and unmistakable way. This message is not written out in starlight, which in the long run would make no difference, rather, it is written out for each of us in the humdrum, helter-skelter events of each day; it is a message that in the long run might just make all the difference."

In the gospel reading, Peter and James and John are having one of those days that Buechner is describing. The message that God delivers blows their day apart and they are changed forever. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him."

One of the books that we discussed in our study group at Trinity was Brennan Manning's The Ragamuffin Gospel and in it he refers to these moments as "second calls": "For the Christian, this second journey is often accompanied by a second call from the Lord Jesus. The second call invites us to serious reflection on the nature and quality of our faith in the gospel of grace, our hope in the new and the not yet, and our love for God and people. The second call is a summons to a deeper, more mature commitment of faith where the naivete, first fervor, and untested idealism of the morning and the first commitment have been seasoned with pain, rejection, failure, loneliness, and self-knowledge. The call asks: "Do you really accept the message that God is head over heels in love with you?"

These moments that we experience...these mystical moments that are so difficult to describe to someone else...these second calls come with a price. With wisdom comes responsibility. If we really do believe in Jesus's charge to us that we are to go out into this broken world and spread the Good News, we must leave ourselves open to heed the voice.

Bishop N. T. Wright refers to today's Gospel reading this way: "The more open we are to God's glory, the more we seem to be open to the pain of the world. We are right to be wary when we return from some great worship service, when we rise from a time of prayer in which God has seemed so close and his love so real and powerful. These things are never given for their own sake, but so that, as we are equipped by them, God can use us within his needy world."

Sometimes the pains of the world are closer than we would like. They are right at our doorstep and more personal.

Story number two is of a woman that was under hospice care. She was eighty years old. She had been active up until the last year of her life. She was able to drive and was live independently. But, within a short period of time, she had a series of TIA's and other illnesses that required her daughter and son-in-law to care for her twenty-four/seven.

Her body was tired and began shutting down. The daughter was also physically worn out and emotionally spent. Gazing at her mother, she questioned the decisions she had made and the advice that she had been given over the last few months and whether or not she had done everything she could have done for her Mom. She was weighed down by guilt that she might not have done everything correctly and tried hard enough. But what she came to realize, and in time accept, was that during those moments she spent with her Mom, God had been her guide, giving her directions as to what she needed to do; in her heart, she knew that God had been talking to her and that she had listened and listened faithfully.

For the three disciples on the mountain with Jesus and Brother Lawrence in the midst of his pots and pans and the dutiful daughter keeping watch over her Mom, these moments are sacred and transforming. Incandescent, if you will. Marcus Borg says "that [these] sacred journeys express the yearning of the heart to be in the presence of God; because during pilgrimage, the self is pointed toward the destination, it is a physical embodiment of inclining the heart toward God."

It is within those moments, in the midst of the chaotic pace of just living from one day to the next or perhaps one hour to the next, that we are brought up short by a "feeling", an unnamed emotion; a reverie; a harkening; a voice. It just may be God talking to us; it may be the start of a new journey or a second call...a transforming moment.

In the midst of these sacred events, in the words of I Samuel 3, let us be able to say: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Amen