

Feast of the Transfiguration

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The mountain top Clouds

Both of these images are significant throughout the scriptures.

It is important to note that Jesus took the three to the mountain to pray. It's a reminder to me of how important prayer is in our lives. It's a reminder that we need to take a break from our everyday routine on occasion and go to some place special just to be still and quiet. I know that when things get busy and hectic in my life and my prayer time gets cut short or skipped it doesn't take long until I notice how everything starts to chaotic and unbalanced in my life.

I think the other thing to note is how important it is that we pay attention to the little things in our lives. Luke tells us that Peter and his companions were tired but still were able to experience the conversation among Jesus, Elijah, and Moses.

And then the clincher comes. The cloud!

When the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh's hand, and they were wandering in the wilderness, God's Presence stayed with them in visible way: a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. When they got scared, hungry, thirsty, and they needed to find God—all they needed to do was look to the cloud.

When Moses climbed Sinai and received the Ten Commandments from God, a cloud descended upon the mountain, obscuring it. The people looked up, and they could no longer see Moses, nor what was transpiring.

When God instructed the Israelites to construct a portable Tabernacle, God filled the tent with his Presence in the form of a cloud. And, later, when Solomon built the Temple, once again a cloud filled the sanctuary.

When I think about God and about clouds, I'm reminded of the verse Joni Mitchel sings in *Both Sides Now*

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall
I really don't know clouds at all

So many times I feel like I really don't know clouds or God. After two trips to the seminary, after teaching religious education for a number of years, after reading the bible from beginning to end – it seems that there are so many more questions than answers.

And maybe, or at least I hope, that perhaps these three who Jesus took with him also had a lot of questions. Just prior to this event, Jesus has fed the multitudes and informed them of the events -

his suffering and death -- that were to come. I can only imagine that they too had a lot more questions than answers.

Rick Morley, an Episcopal priest, writes about the Transfiguration in this way:

So, when the cloud descends atop the mountaintop with Jesus, Peter, John and James...we shouldn't be left surprised at what's happening.

The Presence of God is enveloping them, as the Presence of God has done time and time again to God's faithful people.

God's Presence manifest as a cloud says something about God. Because, clouds don't bring more clarity, they obscure. They hide.

And, in this sense they remind us of the mystery of God

And then from the cloud we hear these words:

This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!

As I read and reread this passage this week, as I prayed about it, several times I found myself getting chills on these hot days as I realized that God wasn't just saying those words to Peter, James, and John but also directly to me, directly to us.

I thought about how many times I get on an airplane and I have this little routine down. I fly enough that I usually get to board fairly early. I get to my seat, get my headphones and book out, put my carryon in the overhead and sit down. When everyone is on board and the flight attendant starts the announcement I'm either well into my book or asleep (Victoria hates it that I can just go to sleep on a plane). I figure I've heard that announcement enough times that I could stand up and give it if needed.

On a flight home from San Diego a couple of years ago; we were delayed because of a warning light in the cockpit. After about 45 minutes, it was all checked out and we were able to depart. As we approached Sea-Tac the captain comes on the PA and announces that the pesky warning light is on again and that we were going to have to take some precautions before landing. You can imagine that suddenly I and everyone else on that plane was suddenly paying attention! We did a few flybys to have the control tower and ground crew check to see that the landing gear was deployed. As people looked out the windows you could see the fire trucks getting in position along the runway. And then we were told to assume the crash position with our heads down and holding on the seat in front of us. You could feel the tension, you could hear people already crying, you could hear people praying.

We landed without incident, people clapped as we taxied to the gate, and people were thanking the pilot and crew.

And as I think about that experience, and if I'm honest with myself, how many times when God is speaking to me have I put on my earphones, the noise cancelling ones, and listened to what I want to hear and not what paying attention to what is important?

I can only imagine that the experience of Peter, James, and John was far more intense than mine on that plane. And I can only ask myself why don't I, why don't we, as humans, listen to the Chosen

One as I did to that pilot and crew on that day. Why don't pay attention to all the way God speaks to us – speaks to us in the gentle breeze? Why, if you're like me, why does it often take a something more like a hurricane for God to get my attention?

“This is my Son, My Chosen; listen to him!”

It is also important to remember that it wasn't only Jesus who was changed that day. Peter, James, and John were also changed. Any doubts they had about who Jesus was were eliminated. And it is obvious that they were overwhelmed as any of us would be. And while, as Luke tells us, “they told no one of the things they had seen”, we know that they spent the rest of their lives spreading the Good News and sharing the teachings of Jesus.

As our sisters and brothers in the UCC remind us, “God is still speaking,”

The questions before us today are:

- Are we willing to take our noise cancelling ear phones off?
- Are we open to being enveloped in the cloud of God's love?
- Are we ready to listen to what Jesus is teaching us?
- Are we ready to be changed?