



Rev. Fred Heard – February 18th 2007

The voice of God is important in today's gospel because at the baptism of Jesus, God was speaking to Jesus. At the transfiguration, the voice was for Peter, James, and John. This is important because the transfiguration is viewed as Jesus "breaking through his humanity of the true form of the Son of God.



Mountains are very important in the Bible. God made himself known to Moses on Mount Sinai. Elijah called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel (kahr'muhl). Jesus revealed his glory to his disciples on the mountain. In this case, no specific mountain name is mentioned because it is thought that the site is unimportant. The important part of this story is the fact that it happened.

This is interesting because today we often suggest that Christians set aside a special place in the home for God-encounters or meditations. I often tell people to pray quietly and then listen for God's soft response. Mother Anne just concluded a series of weekly Epiphany Meditations. We believe and encourage the quiet and the calm.

Several weeks ago, I asked a group of senior citizens to think about what God wanted them to do today. The follow-up came this last Wednesday when I asked them where God is and where they encounter God? Our own Allan Greenland said that God is everywhere. Someone else said God is inside us and another lady suggested that we put it all together.

Folks who enter recovery often seek out special places where they may be in conversation with their Higher Power. They often choose God as their Higher Power and many times 12-steppers go to a monastery or some other remote place for meditation. I sense, in most people's minds, that a place with noise is not perhaps the most satisfactory place for meditation. Many of us are encountering the labyrinth as a special "top of the mountain."

The view from the top of a mountain is often spectacular and it would be more so if Jesus took you to the top himself. Jesus wanted to pray. Do you think he wanted company? Well perhaps—but more importantly, he wanted them to

glimpse God...and also to experience his glory. How would he let them know he was more than a great leader? He was like God—He was God—He is God. Now that is really special—on a mountain top or anyplace else.

Jesus took Peter and John and James to pray. While he prayed, his facial appearance changed. His clothes became dazzling white. “Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah—the great men from Israel’s history. They weren’t the only visitors. A cloud descended on the disciples, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Turning back to the beginning, those who awaited Jesus before his birth expected a King—a royal king like David...a king clothed in purple. They expected a king that would raise armies to drive the Romans out of their land. This mountain top visit with Jesus was not what they expected. The events of the mountain top demonstrated in no uncertain terms that Jesus was more than a “usual king.” There would be questions all along about his greatness. They would not fully understand how different Jesus was until the crucifixion and resurrection and still there would be doubts. On this day on the mountain a seed was planted.

Have you ever experienced a transfiguration? Is there a religious event in your life that so transformed you that it shook you to your core? Have you ever come face to face with God and completely turned your life around? I have seen such events while I have been a priest at Trinity. Recently in one of my sermons, I referred to the man who was dying a few months ago and professed to be an agnostic. Only reluctantly, he accepted a blessing and then the tears rolled down his face. On his death bed he was face to face with God and he went to be with God at 5:00 am the next morning. I have looked into the faces of parishioners at Trinity who are dying and watched as a perfect peace came over their faces. I watched as a very advanced Alzheimer’s patient sat on the edge of his bed as I gave him communion—just days from the end—and he recited the communion service word for word. He saw the face of God.

As Christians, we often say that God will always take you to his bosom and that it is never too late. I have had people say, would he really take a despotic madman? Well yes if there was a true conversion. Many of us who grew up in the 1950’s and 1960’s remember Eldridge Cleaver. As a young man, Cleaver was involved in various kinds of crime. In 1957 at age 22, he was convicted of assault with intent to commit murder. He admitted to raping a number of women. He advocated violence as a way of redressing racial injustice. In 1968 he was involved in a shootout with Oakland police. He jumped bail and lived for a number of years in Algeria and Paris. Then Cleaver had one of those dramatic conversion experiences that we hear about. He had a vision. This is how he reported his vision in his book, *Soul on Fire*. He said: “I saw all my former heroes paraded before my eyes...Fidel Castro, Mao Tse-tung, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, passing in review--each one appearing for a moment of time,

and then dropping out of sight, like fallen heroes. Finally, at the end of the procession, in dazzling, shimmering light, the image of Jesus Christ appeared.

Cleaver became a Christian--turned on to Jesus as fervently as he had been turned on earlier to violence. His life was never the same again. In one moment, he was a man of violence. In the next moment, he was a man of peace. Eldridge Cleaver had a dramatic vision of Christ. It was not expected, it was dramatic and life changing and so like the experience of those three disciples who were with Jesus on the mountain during the transfiguration.

Most of us will not experience the drama that I have mentioned this morning because many of us grew up in the church and knew of Christ from the beginning or we came to our faith slowly and deliberately over a period of time. Perhaps our mother's knee was our mountain top but perhaps it was a bar where nothing seemed to work. Perhaps our mountain top was a broken marriage or a traumatic death in our family. The transfiguration of Jesus might be something foreign to us or difficult to understand—but if we search within our own lives and soles perhaps we will be comfortable with what that lady said at the nursing home—that God is within us and in our minds and all around us and we should “just put it all together.”

Jesus took his disciples to the mountain to pray. They went there to place themselves in the presence of God. They went to the mountain to talk to God. Even more however, they went there to listen to God. Prayer is a conversation with a loving God that helps to align us with God's will. The times when we invite God to guide us--and sit quietly listening and talking with God are our most important prayer times.

In the famous painting of Christ painted by Holman Hunt more than a century ago, Christ is knocking at a closed door. There is no handle on the door. We must open the door to Jesus. The handle is on the inside. When we ask, “Where is God?” Did we remember to open the door?

When we pray and when God presents Himself to us let us experience that as our transfiguration. Mother Theresa said: Love to pray.

Feel often during the day the need for prayer, and take trouble to pray.

Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself. Ask and seek, and your heart will grow big enough to receive Him and keep Him as your own. AMEN