

Mark 9:2-9

*Six 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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then 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.’ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As 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.*

On top of the mountain Jesus is transfigured. His face changes and begins to glow with the holiness of God. He’s not alone on that mountain; there is a gathering of the most holy people: Moses and Elijah are there with Jesus. The whole mountaintop is filled with the holiness of God. Just like in the stories in the Old Testament where the Cloud of Presence leads the Israelites through the desert — that presence of God envelops the mountain and the people on the mountain.

All through the Bible mountaintops were often where people encountered God. Mountains are high and in theory closer to heaven, closer to God. Moses first encounters God in a burning bush on a mountain and then later meets God on the mountain and returns with the Law, the 10 Commandments in hand. When he comes down the mountain his face is glowing so much, he has to wear a veil so that the people can handle looking at him. Elijah goes up the mountain and God passes by — not in a great wind or in an earthquake or in fire, but in the sound of sheer silence giving him the strength to carry on.

Those Bible stories from the Old Testament and this one we read this morning are the mother-of-all God Sightings. They are transcendent experiences of God who is... *God, almighty, everlasting*. God is holy with a glory that is beyond our ability to comprehend. And, at the same time, these experiences bring God closer, immanent. These are ‘heaven-breaking-into-earth’ moments. Moses, Elijah, Jesus and the three disciples experience an incredible God Sighting.

But many people experience the presence of God in more ordinary ways.

In the middle of all of life’s scurrying busyness, sometimes there are moments when there is a crack through which we see heaven. You might have a dream. You might

have a moment standing by the water's edge when you see a sunset or a rainbow, and it speaks to you of God's presence and tells you that there is more than what we see here. Whether big and spectacular or small and meaningful, these God Sightings are wonderful moments of connection to the mystery and love of God. They help to give us strength when we come back down the mountain and back to all that is challenging in life.

Usually when we read this text, we think of it being an experience to increase the faith of the disciples and as a preparation for what is to come. The Transfiguration, the story of Jesus on top of the mountain, is always the text the week before the season of Lent begins. From Wednesday on (Ash Wednesday) we begin our journey to the cross — to the death of Jesus and then the resurrection. Just before this scripture, in Mark 8:31, Jesus starts to prepare the disciples.

*“Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* In this scene on top of the mountain there is a taste of the promise and a reminder of who Jesus really is, before the very real and human suffering that is to come.

I don't doubt that that is part of the meaning of this incredible God Sighting. But if the experience was meant to increase the faith of the disciples, why did he only bring 3 out of 12? Jesus was also strangely silent through the whole thing. He doesn't turn it into a teaching moment. He doesn't say “Hey, Peter, John, James — I'd like you to meet my family! This is Moses, this is Elijah and ah ...this — well you can't exactly see him— but this is my dad.” Jesus doesn't even want to talk about it on the way down the mountain ... and even forbids them from talking about it until he has risen from the dead.

The impression I have is that it was Jesus who needed this. Remember last week we talked about Jesus needing to go somewhere alone and pray. He needed to connect to God. Jesus is so very human. Last week's scripture, along with texts like when Jesus is on the cross and says, *“My God, why have you forsaken me?”* suggest that **Jesus experienced disconnection from God**. It's an interesting thought. I know that some of you have experienced a spiritual disconnection. It's a painful thing to go through. Mother Theresa experienced a spiritual disconnection for a lot of her adult life. Depression can cause a spiritual disconnection and so can conditions like Alzheimer's. If you are experiencing a spiritual disconnection, go easy on yourself. If Jesus experienced it, then there will likely be times in our lives when we will too.

**Connection**, both spiritually and physically with people around us, is so very important. We all need a sense of identity — who we are— and a feeling of belonging to be healthy. That's partly why the **60's scoop** was so damaging. In the 1960's large

numbers of Indigenous Children were taken from their mothers at birth (or later) and put into the child welfare system to be adopted by white middle-class families. Most were adopted in Canada, but others were sent to families around the world.

As one report stated “By the mid-1960’s, the number of Indigenous children in the child welfare system in some provinces was over 50 times more than it had been in the beginning of the 1950’s. During this time, Indigenous communities faced high rates of poverty and socio-economic barriers, in large part due to the impacts of Residential Schools and the restriction of rights through the Indian Act. Instead of providing these communities with the proper resources and support, provincial governments decided the solution was to take Indigenous children away from their homes. ...the Survivors of the “Sixties Scoop” have faced a multitude of challenges and long-term impacts, ranging from a loss of heritage and cultural identity to low self-esteem. Survivors have grown disconnected from their culture and families which have led to feelings of confusion and isolation.”

We are learning how much identity and belonging are important to we humans.

We have a sense of this need for connection within my own family. It was a year ago this month that my husband learned he had a sister he knew nothing about. I was at a volleyball tournament in Kingston when I received a message on messenger. It started out “*Dear Kimberly, you don’t know me but I hope you won’t mind me contacting you.*” She then introduces herself and offers condolences for the loss of my mother-in-law, Alex’s mom Fran Heath. Then came the bombshell: “*You may not be aware but, before she met her husband Dave, Fran bore a daughter with her then boyfriend, in 1962. That child was me, and when Charles told her that, although he loved us both, he did not want to marry her, Fran chose to give me up for adoption.*” The message goes on to say that she was brought up in a loving home and at the age of 30 started to research who her parents were. She actually reconnected with Fran, her birth mother in the early 2000’s, and for a few years, whenever Fran visited the U.K., she would stop in London and visit Kate. But she never told us about her daughter. And it was around that time that we started noticing signs of dementia. Fran died of Alzheimer’s. So, for more than a decade Kate heard nothing from her mother, until she googled her name and saw her obituary. She watched the recording of the funeral service I presided at which was still on the funeral home’s website.

Kate attached her birth and adoption certificate as well as a picture of her. She looks so much like her mother.

At first I was shocked and I wondered if it was some kind of a scam. That night my husband Alex and I were heading to a pub for a little date night and he ordered club soda with lime. I interrupted and said, “You’re going to want something stronger than a

club soda!”

Alex looked at the message and the documents she had sent and was convinced it was not a scam, but real. And indeed it was. Of course, it was a bombshell for the whole family, and Kate was apologetic that this might be unwanted news. But Kate had lost both of her adoptive parents and that pull for identity and belonging was greater than the fear that came with reaching out.

I remember Alex proclaiming with wonder “I have a sister!” He had recently lost his mother, and for a few reasons isn’t so connected to his brothers ... but here was a new connection.

Since that time we’ve had some FaceTime calls and Alex connects regularly, and he connected his sister to his first cousins — also her first cousins — in England.

On this side of life there is disconnection. My guess is that most of you have experienced or maybe now are experiencing disconnection with family, whether because of death and loss or because of breakdown in relationship, or any number of life’s imperfections. It’s a painful thing. It’s not easy.

Somehow as I meditated on this text I was struck by the image of Jesus connected for a brief moment to his true home. There they are together on the mountain. The scripture doesn’t say that Moses, Jesus and Elijah were holding hands, but you somehow feel that unshakable bond — that thread that links Jesus to the others is so strong in that moment.

But unlike last week, Jesus doesn’t go to this place alone. He takes his 3 closest disciples with him. Maybe to teach them ... but I can’t help but think that it was even more because they were his people on earth. It was like Jesus wanted them to feel that connection — to know that they too were part of that circle, connected to him, to Elijah, to Moses to God.

You know, as we have read this text, we are there too. In theatre you have the 4<sup>th</sup> wall, which is the audience. You’re not supposed to touch that wall in theatre. As we read this scripture today we take down that barrier. That’s what happens when we read the Bible — it comes alive and we find ourselves in it. It’s not just the three disciples on that mountain, *you too* have been invited there. As followers of Jesus, we go where Jesus goes, and this morning we are part of that inner circle. Jesus longs for us to know that whatever disconnections you experience on earth, and there are so many, that you belong there on the mountain. You are a child of God. You too are beloved. You too are connected to those who have gone before you.

Now I'd like to invite my mother to come forward and share an experience she had of a dream that was interrupted by a visit from heaven.

*Wendy Bennett's testimony:*

*It was kind of a funny thing that he'd pick a Sunday morning, but then again, maybe not! My husband, Rev. Dr. Alan Bennett, had passed away the week before, on a Saturday evening. No wonder I was in the middle of a very depressing dream. I was wandering around inside an empty old school building, (I used to be a teacher!) and then I went outside. There were a couple of homeless-looking guys sitting on the grass and leaning against the brick wall. I sat down a few feet away and stared out at the big empty parking lot. It was a dark, cloudy day, and I've never felt so sad, so hopeless, and so alone.*

*Then suddenly, physically — someone grabbed my hand and pulled me to my feet! He took me in his arms and started dancing — waltzing around the parking lot! It was Al. (He always loved dancing!) The sun came out, and I was blown away. There was music playing. I saw a band ... then as we danced, I looked around and saw people gathering around, watching us.*

*I was delighted — blown away! But puzzled. I said, "Hey Al, all these people are staring at us, but nobody else is dancing!" He just smiled and looked at me, his eyes so full of love, and kept on dancing. Then something dawned on me. I thought "Just look at **him!** Look into his eyes!" And I did.*

*Never have I seen him so handsome, so full of love.*

*And then — poof! He was gone. I sat up in bed. The sun was shining through the screen door of our bedroom — and I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he had come back for one last dance.*

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In this life we wake up from the dream, we come back down from the mountain, but that doesn't mean we forget the dream or the connection we felt. One day we will know that death and disconnection will be no more.

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