

Mountains are awe-inspiring. I could sit and look at mountains off in the distance almost as much as I could stare at the ocean. They are the most majestic creation on earth. So, we find Jesus, with Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray. This was about 8 days after Peter made the statement that Jesus was the Messiah in verses 20-22. The transfiguration provides a dramatic confirmation of Peter's statement and a look of the glory that will be present when God's kingdom is present. Why did Jesus take just those 3 disciples and not all of them. It may be that those 3 were the first of the 12 men that Jesus chose to follow him and they served as the inner circle, maybe they were even his best friends. They were present as being eyewitnesses at many miracles. He also may have been preparing these 3 to serve in leadership roles for the other disciples.

On this mountain, the 3 disciples see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, both of whom were on mountains when THEY experienced God and life changing events. Moses, who represents the law, of course, received the 10 commandments and came down from Mt. Sinai with his face so transformed from speaking directly with God, that the people below were afraid. Of course, they were probably afraid too, that they were in trouble for worshiping a golden calf, but Paul writes that Moses put a veil on his face to protect those who looked at him. Elijah represents the prophets, and climbed a mountain and was in a cave to encounter God, both of whom experienced an exodus. On this mountain, they were speaking to Jesus about the ultimate exodus, his departure through resurrection.

All of a sudden, our boy, impulsive Peter speaks up and wants to build 3 houses for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter was like that. He spoke up when something needed to be said. He spoke up when nothing needed to be said. He was the only one to jump out of the boat to walk with Jesus on the water, until fear took over and he started sinking. He was the only disciple to say who Jesus was, the Messiah. He was the only

one rebuked by Jesus when he insisted that Jesus was NOT going to wash his feet. He is the only one who jumps out of the boat and swims to shore when they finally realize that it's Jesus fixing breakfast on the shore. He's the only one who comes to Jesus' aid when he was arrested and cuts off the ear of the soldier who had hold of him. He's also the only one who denied knowing his best friend.

But now, he wants to build houses. This may seem a really strange thing to thing of in the face of what they were seeing, but in that area, at that time of year, there was a Festival of Booths, or Feast of the Tabernacles. A joyful celebration commemorating the end of the agricultural year when grapes and olives were harvested. It was a time to thank God for all of the preceding year's provisions and served as a reminder of the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan. During the 7-day feast, each family constructed a booth to live in. They were temporary shelters with thatched roofs and decorated with citrus fruits. It's a movable feast that is celebrated even now by actually building a 3 walled and roofed booth in which Jews eat meals and sleep, usually built on a private balcony or backyard. A little teaching moment here....

So, was Peter trying to keep in mind the festival instead of attempting to keep the presumably dead guys on earth? Their teacher had previously talked about captivity, suffering and death, but here they were with him, Moses and Elijah, and the dazzling clothes and changed face of their beloved master. Glory was already here for him! He didn't have to suffer after all...this was his glory! But the way to God for Jesus cannot bypass the suffering and the cross. Or was he trying to keep all of this revelation just to himself for all time?

For those who have experienced their own mountaintop experience, at retreats or weekend events, we want to keep those memories forever. We want to keep the joy, the intensity, the awe of that moment with us. A few of us have experienced that

during a Cursillo weekend. Cursillo literally means a short course in Christianity. Without getting too much into it, the weekend starts on a Thursday night and ends on Sunday afternoon. You are a community with others and establish families that you sit with and listen to speakers on specific topics with discussion and revelation about others and yourselves. You eat, sleep and spend the entire weekend in that community. The weekend unfolds in layers, with surprises and delights. Every aspect of the weekend shows you the unconditional love of God. Some people don't have that mountaintop experience and that's ok. On Sunday, after everything is said and done, it's difficult to go back to your home and community and try to explain the emotion, the experience, to those who have never been. A lot of people say nothing, other than it was a great experience. It's hard to put into words what that experience was.

The only way to keep Cursillo alive and reestablish that mountaintop experience was to be part of the 4<sup>th</sup> day community, which is made up of everyone who went to the weekend. The others that staffed the weekend had previously been through the weekend as candidates and months of preparation was geared into putting the next weekend on for new candidates. The 4<sup>th</sup> day was designed for those people to be accountable to others for taking what you learned at Cursillo, out into your environment by meeting in small groups and follow a series of questions to discuss. Over the years, the 4<sup>th</sup> day grew smaller until it no longer exists. I was the last Rector of a weekend held at Trinity in 2004. It was a great weekend, in which even the Bishop worked in the kitchen. We had 12 candidates and of those, 6 had volunteered to work the various areas during the next weekend. We again planned for months and scheduled the next weekend. Coming upon 2 weeks before the weekend, we only had 3 candidates and the weekend was cancelled. Clergy didn't respond well with promoting the weekends

if they were not familiar with Cursillo, the small groups had dissipated and we haven't had a weekend since then.

Bishop Scarfe tried to reestablish the 4<sup>th</sup> day, but life got in the way of planning for another weekend, so that particular mountaintop experience opportunity no longer exists. Was Peter trying to retain his experience and keep it to himself? It's certainly understandable to want that and not take a chance to let it go. His sharing of that glory might have meant he would have less.

What was your mountaintop experience? Mine was in a courtroom in Phoenix, Arizona in 2001. My step-granddaughter, Hannah, was killed by a driver in 1999 at age 9. Her mother, Eleanor, was driving and was seriously injured. This driver wasn't drunk, she was a then, 18 yr old girl who decided to get high with a friend, which was her first bad choice. The 2<sup>nd</sup> bad choice was to get behind the wheel. It took 2 yrs to come to trial, but in the end, Trish decided to plead guilty and take the sentence. Eleanor and I were the only ones in the family that forgave Trish for causing the death of Hannah. My step-son, Scott, nor my late husband ever forgave her. Eleanor asked me to join her in going to the sentencing. Of course I said yes. It was perfect timing, because my husband would be on a fishing trip at the time and wouldn't know I was gone. I just didn't have the strength to do battle, again, with him about forgiveness.

On the night before court, Elle and I were in the hotel room and she shared with me all the letters and poems written by Trish and her family over that 2 year period. Their attorneys had told them that no communication with anyone on Hannah's side was allowed. Not even to convey their deep sorrow at what had happened because that would imply guilt before a trial. When Trish decided to plead guilty, they went ahead and sent Elle all the communication they had wanted to send. It was overwhelming, the hurt and grief that they felt for not only Trish and the havoc her bad choices had on

them, but especially the pain she caused Hannah's family. When it was time for us to go to the mic and talk to the judge, Elle wanted me to go first. When I asked the court to demonstrate leniency. He asked why. When I told the court that Elle and I had forgiven Trish, there was this audible gasp from the left side of the room when everyone broke. It was almost like I could feel the wind from the gasp and then the cries began. There was about a 5 minute pause for people to calm down. The judge even said in his 25 years on the bench, he had never heard anything like it. It was then that I felt the glory of passing forgiveness on to others who needed it. Just like our family needed to hear the remorse and sorrow they felt and weren't allowed. I DID admonish the court for this, that it wasn't right to demand silence between families when both sides were in pain. His look of surprise brought the prosecutor to my side to get me to sit down before I said anything more about the court's wrongs. Did I see dazzling white or hear a voice from a cloud that day? No. Was I transformed? Yes. Trish served the full 7.5 years in prison. During that time, she started bible studies and college courses. She started Locks of Love from behind the wall. Upon release, she has gotten her Master's in psychology, specializing in helping kids at risk. She got married and has 2 great kids. She still gives a presentation to youth groups and classrooms about her bad choices and consequences. She asked me for a letter that I would write to the governor of Arizona, permitting her to go into prisons with her story. As a felon, she ordinarily wouldn't be allowed. After much communication, she was finally allowed this ministry. She gets up every morning and sees the scar on her face as a result of her choices, that she refuses to cover up as it serves as a visible reminder to herself of her consequences and her feelings of unworthiness. But I believe with all my heart that the first soul she encounters upon her own transfiguration, will be that of Hannah, leading her home.

Getting back to the Gospel, God speaks from the cloud. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time people

around Jesus has heard a voice talk about him. The first is at his baptism where is says directly to Jesus: "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." Now God says to the disciples, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" I don't think he means to just listen to him...DO what he says. Not just listen. The gospel of John in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, has God speaking for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time while in Jerusalem after he was celebrated into the city with palms. After Jesus tells people that he must be lifted up to rise in glory, a voice is heard by them saying "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." Jesus then tells them the voice was for their benefit, not his. Soon after the event on the mountain, Jesus and his disciples will go to Jerusalem, where Jesus will come to his own exodus. The transfiguration is a day that gives us a glimpse of the coming future glory of Christ at Easter.

The disciples then kept this experience to themselves and told no one. Why wouldn't they want to run down the mountain and at least tell their friends what they had seen and heard? We hear a lot of times when Jesus tells people to NOT tell anyone what they have seen. Scholars have suggested that if his identity were known, everyone would actively try to save him from suffering and the cross, interrupting the divine plan. The transfiguration that day was never meant to shine a light on Jesus' glory alone, its glory shows us our own. Brothers and Sisters, no matter how unworthy we feel we are, no matter the bad choices we've made, the hurtful words or actions, WE are God's children. He may not like all that we do, but he loves us enough to show us what, in our end, will happen when WE are transfigured. Amen

Robin Sade