

**Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2021, St. Anne's  
2 Kings 2:1–12; Psalm 50:1–6; 2 Corinthians 4:3–6; Mark 9:2–9**

In today's readings we hear two stories of extraordinary events – Elijah ascending bodily into heaven on a whirlwind, and three of Jesus' disciples experiencing a mystical vision of Jesus in heavenly raiment talking with Elijah and Moses. Many of us don't know *what to make* of stories like these – these kind of experiences are outside our usual 'frame of reference.' In **our** experience the world just doesn't work this way. But the Bible is **full** of such stories. Moses and the burning bush, rivers or seas parting so people can cross on dry ground, not just Jesus but his *disciples* healing the sick or casting out demons with a touch, and raising people from the dead. What are we to make of such stories? Personally, I've never seen a bush spontaneous burst into flame and then burn without consuming itself. No one **I** know can command the waters to part. Most of us *don't* hear the voice of God addressing us out of clouds or whirlwinds or bushes - or if we *do* we probably don't want to **admit** it. Nobody **we** know ascends to heaven in a chariot pulled by fiery horses - they die in hospital, or maybe a car accident. So, it's easy to mentally shrug our shoulders and dismiss the matter as 'just the kind of stuff you find in the Bible'. Or think, 'well, that's lovely - Jesus was seen on a mountain top in brilliant shining clothes talking with two long dead men -but *so what*. What does it have to do with **me**?'

But we ignore the miraculous and the mystical at our own expense. When we cut ourselves off from the miraculous in our own experience, we also cut ourselves off from potential experiences of God. And in doing so we devalue, or neglect, a whole range of faith experience - the ecstatic experience; the dreamers' vision; the worshipper's conviction that they've felt the presence of God; the dying person's assertion that they had a moment of peace where Jesus showed them the glory that

lies beyond death. Sadly, sometimes we discount these experiences even when it's our *own* experience. Because we don't know how to *understand* them. They don't fit into our normal frame of reference. And, maybe we're also a little worried we might be thought **crazy** if we *tell* anyone. But let me tell you – if you've had a mystical experience, you are NOT alone. They aren't universal, but they aren't as uncommon as we sometimes think.

Many Christians think *being* a Christian means, *believing* certain things. And then also being 'nice' and doing occasional 'good deeds' as a result of what we believe. And there's absolutely **no doubt** that God calls us to follow the teachings of Jesus and **act** with love. That is what living a life of faith **is** about. But our faith is **also** about entertaining angels, and experiencing the divine, not **just** *believing* certain *ideas*. It's about being open to God's presence in our daily life **and** seeking justice and resisting evil. It's about being refreshed *by* God, as much as it is about refreshing *others* in God's name. If we don't *experience* God's presence in our own lives, then how can we possibly bring God's love to others? If we don't *tend* to **our own** spiritual life, then how can we *be* people of God? Being *transformed* by the power and love of God is at the **heart** of being a Christian, and that requires an active relationship with God. Of course, not all of us are *going* to have mystical or mysterious experiences - and we don't *need* to. But we **do** need to be open to the possibility. To have a living, vibrant faith we need to allow *God* to hold a real and active place in our life, and we need to regularly *nurture* our spiritual connection to God.

This need for connection to the divine seems to be a fairly universal aspect of being human. Despite the fact that **we** live in an increasingly *secular* society

where fewer and fewer people go to worship of any variety - the world is **full** of people who are seeking to *experience* the divine. Seeking a sense of the mystical and the spiritual in our dry, rational world. They try all kinds of things in hopes of having a 'spiritual experience'. They fast, they beat drums, they go on pilgrimages. Some go to seminary and some go to India. Some try 'new age' spirituality and some follow old traditions. They go on retreats, and they go hiking in old growth forests. But what they are all looking for - underneath all the external trappings, is an experience of the *divine* in **their** life. They want to come face to face with the *real thing*. And tragically, most of them **won't** ever walk in the door of a church looking for it - because they *don't think we* have it. They look at **us** and tragically they see people focused on what looks to them like stale traditions, not on the transformative heart of the Spirit. They see people who are more focused on ourselves and our own *desires* than on God, or actually living a *deeply spiritual life*.

Now, in fairness sometimes people don't look to churches for their spiritual needs because of their own *past* bad experiences of 'religion'. But we also need to admit that in part, people don't look at church *expecting* meaningful spiritual experiences, because *most of us* rarely talk about our *own* spiritual lives. How often do **you** share your experience of God with others outside of church? Or even, for that matter, within it? Not to try to convince someone you have 'The Answer', not to try to 'convert them' to your own beliefs or way, but just to **share your** experience of God. How often do you talk to *anyone* about... the strength you find through prayer, or the ways you experience God in a worship service or about the ways that belonging to a community of people who are also seeking God strengthens your own spiritual journey.

But it's also a sad truth that many church-going Christians **don't**, in fact spend much time, if **any**, attending to our spiritual life, *outside* of attending church once a week. A lot of good 'church-going' Christians **don't** spend significant time in prayer, meditation, Bible study, retreats or reading books to nourish our spiritual journey. The Bible tells us that Jesus *frequently* went off to quiet places to pray - he regularly spent *time* renewing himself in the presence of God. And *we* need to do that too!

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday - the start of the 40 days of Lent. Lent is a season to deliberately **take** time to renew our spiritual connection to God. Forty days set aside to strip life down to its basics, so we can focus on, and renew, the *sacred* in our lives. A season to help us to centre our souls, and prepare for the great mystery of Good Friday and Easter.

This Lent I invite you to consider setting aside a little time *each* day for prayer. At its most basic, prayer is **not asking** God for anything, but **opening** yourself to God, and God's will, so that you are **transformed** by *intentionally being* in God's presence daily. There are lots of ways to pray and open yourself to God's presence so I invite you to do whatever will feed **your** relationship with God. Contact me if you'd like some suggestions for what you might do. But whatever the specifics - open yourself to experiencing the divine. Open yourself to the *possibility* of the mystical and the miraculous. **Expect** God to break into the ordinariness of your life in some amazing way. And maybe God will! But whether or **not** you *ever* have a mystical, unexplainable experience, strengthening your spiritual life **will transform** you in ways that bring strength and peace and wholeness into your life.