

Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 2
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

Transfiguration A
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
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What To Let Go Of?

My sister and brother-in-law are hoping to move from Sonoma County to Bainbridge Island in the spring. As a result, my sister has been going through lots and lots of things – things that were precious to our grandparents, things that were precious to our parents, things of our own we thought we needed to hang on to, things to pass on to our children. As it turns out, our adult kids don't want most of those things... and surprisingly, neither do we.

It isn't that those things aren't important or weren't important to people who remain very important to us. It's just that there are so many things in our worlds, and we don't really need or even want them all. We want the closeness of connection we had with our mom when she talked about the carved elephant her big brother brought back from a tour of duty in Asia. We want the closeness of connection we had when our grandpa with his great big hands and missing fingers put dough in those old, dented bread pans and left it to rise in the warm bathroom. We want the closeness of connection we had at Christmas time when we unwrapped each precious and particular ornament and told its story. And while it really is the closeness of connection we love about these things and not perhaps the things themselves, there are still some things we keep. Not because of their monetary value, but because they are of great value in a Life Lessons sort of way. They help us to remember the best in the ones we love and maybe even the best in ourselves.

One of the few precious things of my mom's I think I will keep forever, is a little framed pen and ink watercolor of a woman shaking a quilt onto a bed. A favorite bit of scripture is penned at the bottom of the frame. "Do all things heartily as unto the Lord." *Colossians 3:23*. Yes, that includes making the bed.

Sometimes it's hard to do all things heartily as unto the Lord. Sometimes I just don't feel like doing ALL things, or even ANY thing heartily. Sometimes I'm too tired. Sometimes I don't want to bother. Sometimes I forget that all of my life is a gift from God and that I want to spend it giving it back for God's glory and the uplifting of God's people. When life feels mundane, when my prayer life feels empty, when God feels silent, it's hard to remember that the very simple fact of being able to make the bed, or even having a bed to make, is a glorious gift from God, and something to be deeply grateful for.

Sometimes when we hear stories like the one we hear today, stories of magnificent, even blinding visions, of prophetic revelations, of mountaintop experiences, we wonder how making the bed as beautifully as we can will ever count for anything. I don't know about you, but the handful of mystical or mysterious or miraculous experiences I've had of God, the few times I've

audibly heard God's voice or physically felt God's presence can easily become the stuff by which we measure the depth of our relationship with God or the magnitude of our faith. And that is a very bad idea.

Yes, those mountaintop experiences are amazing, astounding, miraculous even! But when we think they are somehow the proof of our faith or our faithfulness, we do ourselves a great disservice. "I can't feel God" we cry, wanting the big experience, forgetting that bidden or unbidden, God is here. Believing THAT is the proof of our faith and faithfulness. And yet, I think I understand Peter, wanting to stay up there on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah and Jesus. After all, they'd just had the mystical experience of a lifetime, maybe one of the best ones in the whole bible! They'd been through so much only six days before – Peter announcing that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus responding by telling his closest friends he would suffer greatly at human hands, be rejected by his own people, be killed, and three days later rise from the dead, Jesus telling them if they really wanted to be his followers, they'd have to take up their own crosses and follow him. What on earth did all that mean? It certainly didn't sound good. And as they were trying to make sense of it all, Jesus called Peter, James and John together and invited them to take a walk up the mountain.

I've climbed many mountains in my life. Sometimes the paths were straightforward. But sometimes, climbing toward the top, there were long, winding stretches where it felt like a labyrinth with switchbacks and direction changes, where the only thing to do was to put one foot in front of the other, trusting that the trail would ultimately take me where I wanted to go. Sometimes, I couldn't tell. But sometimes, when I finally reached the top, there was a moment of revelation. I could see where I'd come from, and I could see where I was going. And that's just what happened to the disciples when they went up the mountain with Jesus.

Imagine it – there they were, at the top of the mountain, far away from everyone. And then it happened! The great epiphany! Jesus was transfigured and the change was so profound that even his clothes began to glow dazzling white! He was transfigured. Transformed. Utterly and completely changed before their very eyes. Gazing at their very human friend and teacher Jesus, the disciples were suddenly dazzled by the glory of his very real divinity. And as if a stunningly glowing Jesus weren't enough, Elijah and Moses were there too!

Well, at that point, Peter was beside himself... he was at the top of the mountain with Moses! Moses, who brought the Law down from Mt. Sinai, Moses, who led the Israelites through the wilderness, Moses, who walked them right up to the Promised Land. And Elijah was there too, the mighty prophet who raised the dead, brought fire down from the sky, and was taken up into heaven in a mighty whirlwind.

The disciples saw where they'd come from in Moses and Elijah. And there between those two holy men of God stood the transfigured Jesus, the Messiah fully revealed, the new kingdom they were entering in to. I don't think Jesus became divine in the transfiguration, but I do think his

full nature – God from God, Light from Light - was revealed. And that revelation changed everything – for the disciples and for us. No wonder Peter offered to build three dwellings so they could all stay put. I imagine he thought the story might unfold differently, that maybe all the talk of crosses and suffering and dying would go away if they could all just stay there in the dazzling light. But Peter couldn't change the story, and neither can we.

And when all of a sudden, the voice of the living God interrupted their musings, Peter and his friends were terrified. But Jesus' very gentle, very human touch took away their fear so they could take that big voice in. *"This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him."* Listen to him. It's all the counsel they got, but it's all the counsel they needed. For those disciples and for us, the command to listen to Jesus didn't only mean hearing his words. It meant following. It meant obedience. It meant letting go of things or ideas or ways of life not meant to be held onto.

Walking down the mountain, the disciples must have been in shock. They didn't want the moment to end – Peter's response made that so clear... "Wait, don't go, I'll build dwellings for all of you, please don't leave." Yet in the blink of an eye, it was over. That's just how life is, isn't it? There are moments we want to hold on to forever, and we can't. People die. Jobs end. Relationships end. We lose our health, our independence or maybe just our self-confidence. That's something of what it is to be human. Dying and rising, dying and rising, dying and rising. And still, it's natural to want to cling to the glorious times, the gentle times, the easy times, the times when God feels close. That's what was going on, on that mountain top you know. God came so close... and when that happened, the disciples had one of those experiences that changes everything – not just for them, but for us too.

Here on this final Sunday of Epiphany, before we depart the season of brightness and light for the penitential shadows of Lent, we are graced with a glimpse of God's glory, offered one last magnificent epiphany, so we can remember that God breaks through even in the midst of the hard parts. In those times when we feel like everything's coming apart, God gives us a glimpse of glory so we can find what we need to get through. God's glory comes in so many forms - in the small kindness of a new friend or complete stranger, in the opportunity to use our gifts and give what we have, in children's laughter, in cups of tea, in friends, a walk in the woods, an unpretentious pen and ink drawing or any other simple recognition of God's love and faithfulness. Like the disciples, we live with uncertainty. But God's love is certain.

As we look forward to our Lenten journey, I pray we will sink into the absolute certainty of God's boundless love for us and accept God's gentle invitation to notice the things that keep God at bay... and then to let those things go so that God can come dazzlingly close. Amen.