

**“Don’t Just Do Something...Sit There!”**

**Exodus 24.12–18 & Matthew 17.1–11**

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What is the transfiguration, anyway? I’ve always had trouble with the idea of Jesus becoming “shiny,” but that outward appearance indicates a dramatic internal change. Pretend for a minute that you’re one of the disciples who has gone for a hike with Jesus. And then they say, “Gee, it’s so good to be here, why don’t we throw up a couple of lean-tos: one for you, one for Elijah, and one for Moses. You never know who is going to drop by. Let’s get busy.” Well, the two prophets show up, and Jesus and his disciples are enveloped by a cloud and then they hear a voice saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” repeating what he had said to those who had witnessed Jesus’ baptism. But, the line God adds is “Listen to him.”

Well, if you’re busying yourself building huts for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, how can you really be listening and be fully attentive? Sure, it was hard anyway, because Jesus was all aglow, but I can imagine God saying, “Shut up, stop scurrying around, and listen!”

You can probably hear the way Matthew’s text mirrors that passage from Exodus 24: Collect three followers, go up the mountain, wait, have a theophany (which is a direct experience of God), listen, and then come down the mountain.

It’s worth pointing out that in the Exodus story, Moses gets to wait for a full 40 days and 40 nights before God speaks. That’s a long time.



I want to get back to the transfiguration part, though. I think many of us have trouble thinking of someone in our lives who has been transfigured (unless they’ve had a little plastic surgery). But, I think most of us have either gone through a metamorphosis ourselves or known someone who has gone through a radical, life-changing transformation. The writer of Matthew’s gospel uses the verb *metemorphothe* to describe Jesus’ transfiguration. You’ve seen people recover from alcoholism or drug addiction; you’ve seen people have their lives forever altered by recovery from a disease or learn to live with one; you’ve seen how becoming a parent can be a dramatic shift.

What kind of metamorphosis have you gone through? What life events have caused you to change who you are as a person? How has your spiritual journey led you through a metamorphosis? Have you been transformed? The Christian journey is above all a journey of transformation. Have you been born again or born anew (if you get stuck on the first phrase)? For some of us there are intense moments of transformation, and for others it’s a gradual process.

Martie McMane, the senior minister at First Congregational UCC in Boulder, whom some of you know, had a very dramatic conversion experience. She is able to tell you the time, date, and place where she decided to open her heart and mind to God. For me, it’s been a gradual awakening that is still in progress. It took me 36 years to hear and accept a call to ordained ministry. So, I want to affirm the journeys of those who are “more tortoise than hare.” I also sometimes wonder whether if we expect lightning bolts and don’t see them, if we are blind to the glory of God all around us, perhaps missing the conversion we’ve been hoping for. And if the experience is instantaneous rather than enduring, what effect does that have on our ongoing practice of our faith?

So, perhaps rather than expect the voice of God to come out of a cloud, we ought to focus on the ways we hear God calling us here at the base of the mountain. We see God most often in the people and world around us, but we don’t always attribute occurrences in our lives to God’s luring us toward wholeness, either directly or through the actions or

thoughts of another human being. So, be on the lookout for transforming experiences in places you might not expect to find them!



We are about to enter another 40-day period when we are invited to come, wait, and listen. Lent provides us with an opportunity to show up, to be patient and persistent in our faith, and to listen for the whispers of the divine speaking through someone or through God's world.

You'll have the opportunity to show up in numerous ways at Plymouth, and I daresay, in other places as well. Our Board of Deacons has prepared a Lenten devotional booklet, and we've printed one for each family, so pick one up on your way out. And we have a soup supper and Ash Wednesday service in three days, beginning at 6:30. Sharon and I will be leading a spiritual formation course for new Christians, called "Living the Questions" beginning this week and continuing for 12 weeks. Showing up is a spiritual discipline that I invite you to engage during Lent.

For many of us, and I include myself among you, waiting can be the hardest part. If you are a hard-driving do-er, it can be difficult to quiet yourself down long enough to catch your breath. Ours is a culture that runs by the clock. A few years back, a friend of mine, Matt Wherley decided that he was being idolatrous in worshipping Chronos, the god of time, rather than worshipping the true God. And so, Matt gave up his watch for Lent. Think of it! Not having your watch to keep you on track; or to keep you running. Along the same lines, the UCC church in South Windsor, Connecticut decided to give up committee meetings for Lent. So, instead, they met for fellowship and Bible study when their committees would otherwise be meeting. Recapturing control of our time (instead of letting time control us) and just waiting can also be a spiritual discipline.

A Buddhist saying reminds me of the disciples and their quest to be useful after they reached the mountaintop and began to build huts. The saying is "Don't just do something...sit there."

Our willingness to just sit quietly in the presence of God connects showing up, waiting, and listening. If we are always doing, rather than always being, how can we expect to hear the voice of God, unless it's one of those times when we get hit "up the side of the head" by a proverbial two-by-four?

So, during the coming season of Lent, I invite you to engage a spiritual discipline of some sort and to **show up, to wait, and to listen.**



Mountaintop experiences can be wonderful (even frighteningly so), but they are not the only route toward transformation, and their power may not persist in one's life. Last year's Men's Retreat considered the question of how we preserve the benefits of a mountaintop experience once we return home. It is then, when the Epiphany is over, Howard Thurman reminds us, that the real work of Christmas begins. One way of continuing the effect of a mountaintop experience is in the context of community. We are here to encourage one another to continue to grow spiritually, to hold each other accountable, and to be Christ to one another.

There is a marvelous poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, I'll share with you in closing. I invite you to become part of the poem by thinking of yourself either as Moses or as Jesus as I ready these words. So go ahead and imagine yourself as one of the two:

I come home from the soaring  
in which I lost myself.

I was song, and the refrain which is God  
is still roaring in my ears.

Now I am still  
and plain:  
no more words.

To the others I was like a wind:  
I made them shake.  
I'd gone very far, as far as the angels,  
and high, where light thins into nothing.

But deep in the darkness is God.

During this season of Lent, which we so often associate with shadows rather than  
bright light, may you be blessed by catching glimpses of God deep in the darkness.  
Amen.