

Every year the church goes mountain climbing. We go, like Peter and James and John did, following Jesus. At the mountain height we see him as he really is. By him and with him and in him the glory of God shines.

But why? Why do we climb to see this light? Why do we take valuable time away from our busy lives and devote ourselves to climbing the mountain where God's glory is revealed? Aren't there hungry to be fed? Jobs to be done? Aren't there bills to be paid? Children to be fed and clothed? Sick to be healed? Grievers to be consoled? Why does Jesus take this time away from his mission? Why do we?

We climb the mountain of Transfiguration each year for the same reason Moses climbed the Mountain - to get a glimpse of the Promised Land - to see where we ourselves are headed.

When Jesus arrived at the mountain top his figure changed and the outside of him, which had been ordinary and like us, shone as if he was not like one of us. Jesus shone with the glory that caused old Moses to shine that day on the mountain of Sinai, when the holy law from heaven came down. He shone with the glory that carried old Elijah up to heaven's height - gone from this world - but alive in the next. He shone with the glory of his own baptismal day, when his Father's voice from above was heard to say: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased" - and indeed those words first uttered at the River are repeated on the Mountain Top.

What can mere mortals say when faced with such glory? "Let all mortal flesh keep silence" says the old hymn. But not Peter. When in doubt, shout it out.

First say the obvious, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Then make a plan without listening: how about we prolong this camp-out on the mountain, Lord? We can rig up a tent for you and Elijah and even one for Moses.

But that, of course was not the point.

Jesus was facing the long journey to another mountain, where he would be lifted higher. Jesus knew that ahead was the long walk to the cross, with all its possible escapes and sidetracks. Jesus knew that he could walk away from the will of the Holy One.

Jesus knew that he had a way out of this, but Jesus also knew that he would not take it. He knew that his death was only weeks away.

As unlikely as it seems, the scripture tells in many places that to be like Jesus is our destiny; that the intention of God in his calling of us is to make us like him.

We are destined for glory - a glory like his - a glory that will make us shine as he shone. But first - as with Jesus - there is cross to bear. And so - each year we climb the mountain of Transfiguration with him. We climb because there is a rough road ahead of us. We climb to share the vision that Peter and James and John beheld, and to be strengthened by it for our return to the lowlands and for the days before we receive the fullness of the glory that Jesus gives to us through his death and his resurrection.

I imagine Jesus seeking the face of the Holy One as he drew near to the time of his sacrifice, - and finding in the example of Moses, the great lawgiver whose face was unveiled when he talked with the Holy One - and in Elijah, the great prophet who was both afraid and yet willing to challenge the kings of the earth, both the strength and the courage for the road ahead.

Jesus looked ahead to the choices of the Passion and God gave him the vision and the strength he needed:  
- the vision and the strength to walk with us in the long steps of life's journey.

And God too wills to give us the vision and the strength we need - the vision and the strength to face the fears and foibles of our lives. - the vision and the strength we need to respond to the call of God to live beyond ourselves, to live lives of sacrifice and courage till the glory we see in Christ settles on us not just for a day, but forever.

The road ahead is the way of the cross.

The glimpse that we are granted of Christ's glory on the holy mountain is the foretaste of heaven; the image of humanity as God intended us to be in creation. We remember this glory of God that calls to us. The mountain of Transfiguration reminds us that though Jesus walked in the way of the cross, he also rose from the dead in the glory of the Father.