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Sermon
Luke 9:28-36
March 3, 2019

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning. Amen.

Um

The day I clearly heard God's call to ministry I was leading a retreat for the middle school age kids at my church and their parents. I hadn't had a chance to reflect yet on the joy I was feeling, holding space for families to have conversations together about their faith, but it was something I had never experienced before in myself. That day I experienced myself fully as a leader for the first time; I felt like those muscles needed to be exercised, but I felt at home in myself. At lunch I sat at a picnic table eating my gluten free sandwich, listening to the conversation around me, when I caught a glimpse of my left shoulder out of the corner of my eye. In that moment, the spirit that animates my body, my spirit embodied, woke up. I had a sensation of looking out through my own eyes for the first time and looked at the body I was inhabiting. In an instant I went from living my human life to being aware I am an embodied spirit having a human experience. Pretty disinterested at this point in the conversation around me, I kept looking around, as if seeing everything for the first time. I didn't know why this was happening to me, but I liked it. And God certainly had my attention.

I rode home on the bus that day feeling like if I didn't intentionally breathe in and out, drink small sips of water and keep my eyes closed, I was going to lose my lunch. It's difficult for us humans to be in God's presence; the light of God's face is too bright, God's voice is too loud for us to really hear, and our hearts would explode if we knew the fullness of God's love all at once. When God is revealed to us, hopefully we get a small enough peek that we are able to experience God's gift to us. Jesus goes up the mountain to pray all the time, every chance he gets he rises early and hikes up to be with God.

It makes me wonder if it is a common occurrence for him to be so in communion with God that his face is changed, like that image of Moses coming down from the mountaintop with a radiant face. Peter, John and James have a very human response to experiencing God; I find it easy to believe they are weighed down by sleep at the sight of Jesus transfigured. I find it easy to believe they have to fight to stay present with the experience when their senses are flooded with information and their biology is trying to shut them down for self-preservation, so they can access the medicine of integration that is activated when we sleep.

Another very human thing we do when we encounter God is try to make it concrete. Peter says, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Let us ground this experience in the physical so we can make sense of it and mark this moment as significant and holy. Our Jewish ancestors in faith built altars to communicate with God and mark important moments on the journey: Noah built an altar after the flood and offered sacrifices there to God (Gen 8:20). Moses made an altar when God established a covenant with the people in the wilderness (Ex 24:4). Joshua built an altar to renew Israel's covenant with God after leading them into the Promised Land (Josh 8:31). King David made altars to ask God to act on behalf of his people (1 Chron 21:22). Today after a powerful experience we might write it down or receive a gift from someone we're with at the time or from nature, maybe a rock or a leaf or a feather; we have a strong human need to have a tangible reminder of God coming close.

Our human response also includes keeping these experiences to ourselves and taking time to process and understand them. It is easy to imagine the disciples keeping the encounter to themselves for quite some time. While they are actively learning from Jesus how to be a conduit for God's power in healing, this is different; they have seen the face of God in Jesus and heard God's voice. All of the information is there for them to put together even if it takes them a lifetime to realize what it means. For now, God certainly has their attention – follow Jesus, listen to him, learn from him.

When Jesus invites us to go up the mountain and pray with him, we don't know what we will encounter. If we see God's back as God passes by, we may be changed, but not in danger; if we see nothing, we can still be assured God is working in some unperceived ways; if God speaks into our lives, we can be sure God's message is offered in love; even if God's message takes us far outside our comfort zones and expectations, we are led by a divine hand that goes ahead of us and knows the way.

As we consider a visioning process, there is a reason I'm inviting us to begin with prayer. Because when we say yes and follow Jesus up the mountain, we open ourselves to God's participation in the process. This is going to sound obvious, but it's true: engaging in prayer individually and in community with a particular intention is different from just thinking about doing it or not doing it at all. Prayer stimulates the connection with God each of us have; I know in my prayer practice, God seems more active in my life when I am intentional about prayer. Prayer takes many forms: body prayer, movement prayer, listening to music, walking meditation, a conversation with someone where God is intentionally invited in, sitting with scripture, inviting scripture to take us on an imaginative journey, centering prayer, Lectio Divina and your own favourite form of prayer I haven't even mentioned. We are only limited by our capacity to imagine forms of prayer.

As a congregation we know how we got to this place in our story; we know the road we've walked; we know some of the things that are important to us; we know where we are drawn to spend our energy. In our prayer and discernment, we are searching for the space God holds for us, where the needs of the world around us meet our unique capacity to serve. We pray for God to reveal a vision that is truly ours, a vision that awakens our spirits and makes us feel alive, a vision that is so clear it gives us the courage to boldly let the rest go. Let us follow Jesus up the mountain that God may reveal God's vision for us and the path that leads us there.