

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM
Rev. Patricia Green
Transfiguration of the Lord-- 2018

Many of us have had them, those times when we felt like we were on top of the world, really happy, confident that we knew all the answers, could solve any problem that came up. Or we felt that we were really close to God, really in tune with God's plan for us. In those moments we were excited and alive, and everything seemed new.

The moment might have come at some exciting event in your life: graduation, baptism, your first kiss, your first day on your first job, your wedding, the birth of a child, even catching your very first fish. It might have been something spiritual, like a week at church camp or a church retreat. Or it might have been something of a smaller, quieter nature, like a very intimate conversation where you felt understood.

We call these "mountain top" experiences. Oh, how we hate to come down. We want to hang on to that moment for as long as we can.

In the Gospel reading for today we have Mark's account of a strange occurrence which we call "The Transfiguration of Jesus." It is one of those rare moments we were just talking about, one of those mountain top experiences which somehow defy adequate description and challenge us to stretch our concept of reality. We might even end up asking the question, "Did this really happen? Or was it just a dream?"

Six days after Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Peter, James and John follow Jesus up the mountain where they were all alone. Typical of Mark, we don't get much detail. Suddenly something incredible happens. Jesus is filled with a bright light, and this light transforms his very being. His skin glows brightly, and his clothing shines a dazzling white, whiter than Clorox could make them. Elijah and Moses appear talking with Jesus. Full of fear and awe, Peter volunteers to build a booth for each. In today's vernacular he might say something like: "Let me get my cell phone and take a selfie." Then a voice speaks "This is my chosen one, listen to him." With a blink of the eye, the vision disappears and Jesus is alone. Unsure of what they have witnessed, the disciples follow Jesus' instructions and keep it to themselves.

The bible is filled with visions and dreams that strengthened the early Christian community, giving it the necessary hope to endure. The vision of Jesus transfigured is a powerful image of God's plan to redeem the world. This divine dream can enable us to transform our present situation into a new reality of hope, in the name of our Lord Jesus.

The first step is to grasp the meaning of the rich imagery of the text. We can see it. It is a world of sheer light. Jasper, carnelian, emerald, like a rainbow, everything shines. The light is God's glory. This same light led the Israelites through the desert. This same light covered the mountain like a cloud when Moses met with God. Later this light filled the Tent of Meeting and eventually came to dwell in the Temple.

We see the source of the light. Jesus who was praying is now filled with the light, and it is streaming forth from him. Included in the sphere of the light are Elijah and Moses. Jesus is not some new prophet founding a new religion. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. This tells us that Jesus is an extension or fulfillment of the old religion.

Jesus speaks to Moses and Elijah, about his mission. He is to go to Jerusalem where he will be tried, and crucified. Through his resurrection, he will make his exodus from earth and ascend to heaven. Like the earlier exodus from Egypt, the people will be liberated. But it is a new kind of liberation. It is not from slavery to the Egyptians, but from slavery to sin and death.

Like Peter, James and John, we are given a glimpse of the transcendent, a peek at the reality that lies just beyond everyday life. The reality we see is a God who came into this world with a mission to deliver us from evil; a God who is willing to act in our behalf; a God who is willing to sacrifice his own son so that the world might be saved from sin and death.

This is a startling vision. Like the disciples, we may not understand it. However, if we don't appropriate the vision it would be worthless for us. Why? Because a vision is only effective if we make it ours. A vision without a seer is worthless. A dream needs a dreamer who can be moved, stunned, questioned and motivated by the scene.

Some years ago, Rev. Kathy, the assisting priest at St. Mark's told me of a vision that she had while driving near Paseo Del Norte and Wyoming. She saw a church on the corner of a vacant property. She wondered "What should I do? Should I believe the vision? Is it my mission is to build a church on this street corner?" She began to pray daily and made this her dream. She told the people at St. Mark's. We all began to pray. Two years later a church planting team was sent out to Desert Hills Elementary school to establish a mission church. After several years, the team purchased a piece of property. Architectural drawings were rendered. Today on the corner of Alameda and Barstow stands Hope in the Desert Episcopal Church.

We must dream. We must have visions of God. We must let our minds go into the future and see a world ruled by God's love. Then we must take those dreams to heart. We must dream about jobs for the jobless, about food for the hungry, about belief for the unbeliever, spiritual growth for the faithful, and peace for the nations.

We have to appropriate God's dreams for the world because then, and only then, they will become effective for us.

You may ask what the value of owning a vision or a dream is. What difference can it make? A vision functions like a blue print. It allows us to set a goal and to walk toward it. Dreams can help us endure because they serve as signs on the way. They tell us how far we have come; they tell us how far we are from the goal.

If you were at the annual meeting, you may remember Laurie Moye's report from the Building and Asset Committee. It was pretty amazing. Over the past six years, we have seen many changes at St. Mark's. I can't begin to list them all. We have changed our worship space, with new flooring around the altar and in the Chapel and re-spaced the pews to make them more comfortable and to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers, and added tables and chairs for our youngest worshipers to use for worship activities. We renovated our Sunday school space and started what is now a very successful Montessori Preschool; we have placed solar panels on the roof to reduce the cost of utilities. We purchased and installed a new boiler to keep us warm this winter. We are now in the process of transforming the courtyard into a memorial garden for Cecil Fish. All of these things and

more began as visions that direct our efforts and serve as signs of how far we have come.

The Transfiguration of Jesus had many effects. It allowed these three disciples to see the Kingdom of God coming in power. It led the disciples to believe that Jesus Christ would deliver his people from sin and death. This faith delivered the Christian community from the bondage of fear. The hope advanced by the vision enabled the disciples to undertake a mission to the world--a mission of baptizing the nations, teaching the commandments and recognizing that the living Lord is present always.

Today the Transfiguration calls us to see beyond our present reality--beyond our limitations. It calls us to make God's visions our own-- visions of growing deeper in our spirituality, visions of reaching out to new members, visions of new life for ourselves, our congregation and our country.