

**Mark 9: 2-9****Last Sunday after the Epiphany****February 11, 2024****The Rev. Katherine Bush**

Last week amid the grasshoppers and dragonflies, Scott called us to attention. Along the way, we heard a plea from the words of the prayer that when we gather for worship we would be delivered from “coldness of heart and wanderings of mind.” I’ve shared in a few conversations recently that when my mind wanders in worship one of the moments that most reliably calls me back to attention is the “Sanctus,” the song we sing as we begin the Eucharistic prayer. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts: Heaven and earth are full of your glory.” Generally, I do not go in much for genuflecting, but often that moment brings me to a place where bowing, bending down just feels like the right thing to do. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. I could just as easily lean back to take it all in, but humbling myself to the glory of God found in heaven and earth feels right to me.

I believe that heaven and earth are full of God’s glory. It’s just that I have trouble remembering that I believe that. I believe that heaven and earth are full of God’s glory; it’s just that I have trouble consistently living my life like someone who believes that.

One of the ways that the early church fathers and mothers talked about the story of the transfiguration: this moment we’ve just witnessed of a dazzling, terrifying, mountaintop experience, is to flip the miracle around. In that way, they suggest that “the biggest miracle was that Jesus didn’t look like this all the time ... [rather] he kept a lid on his natural radiance, his innate glory. And in this moment the lid came off briefly.” Madeleine L’Engle takes up the thread writing, “Suddenly they saw him the way he was, the way he really was all the time, / although they had never seen it before, / the glory which blinds the everyday eye and so becomes invisible. / This is how he was, radiant, brilliant, carrying joy / like a flaming sun in his hands. / This is the way he was — is — from the beginning, / and we cannot bear it.”

The miracle they are proposing is the hiding away of the glory of God most of the time. Take a moment to think about the story that way, that it was a momentary glimpse of the constant, true identity of Christ. But the miracle was that they lived up close with Jesus for years without being perpetually terrified. Take a moment to think about the whole story - our whole story - that way, that every now and then we see things as they really, always are, and that things really, always are full of the glory of God. But we can go about our little lives without always needing to shield our eyes. It seems that the project of God is in part to make God’s presence small enough that we can bear it, to embed divinity into the ordinary stuff of life so that we are not perpetually blinded and overwhelmed, to hide away some of the magnificence and beauty. And our project is to remember that it’s there even when it’s hard to see.

But two things happen to disrupt these projects. One is that we forget that the ordinary stuff of life can be infused with holiness and brilliance because, well, it’s so ordinary. In scripture, we hear story after story of regular old people wandering through their lives uncomprehending that they are wandering with God. In church, we hand out papery wafers and a sip of wine, or we pour water from a pitcher, not even enough for a baby’s bath, and we want to remember that all of this is holy but some days it’s hard. We want to know that we are wandering with God, but

sometimes it's February with its days of rain. Sometimes the bread doesn't seem like the food of angels. It's like we dimmed the lights too much and we can't see by that light. So we have trouble living our lives like people who believe that all of life is miraculously charged with the presence of God.

The second, and almost opposite way that this project of God's infusing everyday life gets disturbed is that from time to time God disrupts this tamped-down version of reality by flipping on all the lights. Sometimes the natural radiance, the innate glory of God blows the lid off anyway - chariots of fire, whirlwinds, blindingly dazzling scenes. And we are toppled over. We grab on and cling to those moments, wanting to build dwellings there, to try to stay there in the whirlwind, to grasp at a chariot of fire. We ask for a hard thing and try to keep our eyes open, to keep watching. We don't want to go back down the mountain. But the far side of the river or the mountain peak is a hard place to live; we cannot bear it, not for very long at least.

And anyway, most of the time we're somewhere in between. We haven't forgotten about God's embedded presence, not completely, but we're also not permanently fixed in a state of awe, tearing our clothes into pieces or deafened by voices from heaven. How do we live in the middle? How do we live lives that look like we believe that heaven and earth are full of the glory of God?

As even the *New York Times* suggests, you can "stop ignoring the mundane miracles in your life." That's an actual headline. We can pay attention and notice even when it's gray for days that there is glory in the just budding Lenten roses and in the gentle kindness of a stranger who holds the door and in the mercy of shelter even for one night. And not just in these visible ways, but even more in hidden ways. We can remember to believe in and to search out the invisible presence of God: in forgiveness offered and accepted, in a heart turned from retribution and cyclical violence toward compassion, in the hope of resurrection amid chaos and death. These are massive, fantastical movements that are imperceptible to the human eye, hidden you might say. Heaven and earth are full of such invisible and illuminating glories. I believe that's true, and I have trouble remembering that I believe that. This is the way it really, always is, although we cannot always bear it. So, on a Tuesday we get smaller, minor moments that we'd hardly call glorious but still sustain us the way we are sustained by someone simply being nearby. And on another day we might just get clothes dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them, overshadowing clouds, and voices from heaven.

"Suddenly they saw him the way he was, the way he really was all the time, / although they had never seen it before." God came to earth, shrinking to fit into a human-sized realm, withholding the fullness, knowing that we cannot bear it. God comes into the world in this almost hidden way but never stops being divine and glorious. Every now and then, we are reminded that this is true. Suddenly, we see heaven and earth the way it is, the way it really is all the time, / although we had never seen it before, / the glory which blinds the everyday eye and so becomes invisible.

In the murky, ordinary days, perhaps the best we can do is live in the space between the big show and the completely forgotten magic. We exist in the space between fiery vistas and mountaintops on the one hand and on the other losing sight altogether of the presence of God. We live in the small, plain moments of our days and learn to find the miraculous there; we tether ourselves to an old song that proclaims that heaven and earth are full of the glory of God, because that's the way it really is.