

Sermon February 19, 2012
by Gail Claus, Lay Associate Pastor

2 Cor 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

Blinded by the Light

Have you ever felt blinded by the light? How about when there are oncoming headlights on an unlighted road? And those halogen headlights. Wow! They give me a definite, scary sense of being momentarily blinded.

Visions and images can blind us or enlighten us.

Many of you have visited the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs. Actually there are a few people here who grew up in Colorado Springs with the Garden of the Gods practically in their backyard. Am I correct? Here you can see great images and visions of God's handiwork. Beds of sedimentary sandstones and limestone had been naturally deposited horizontally, but the sheer force of the 14,000-foot high Pikes Peak tilted these rocks vertically. Three hundred million years of geology is packed into the red rock. And now the image enters. Who would expect to see kissing camels in rocks? Or a huge rock balanced in a seemingly impossible formation? You can also see cathedral spires and a steamboat. All rock formations. These are rock-solid images.

Now I'd like to tell you about a friend of mine.

Rob was the Fire Chief of the Beverly Hills fire department. His passion was to ride his bicycle during his time off. One Saturday in Pismo Beach, he was riding up a hill on a two-lane road. He was hit from behind with such force that he went flying through the air, only to find himself landing on the pavement and looking at an eighteen-wheeler.

He found himself in such a state that he was floating above his body looking down at himself. Then he saw a twisted, spiral, greenish to brownish tunnel and he knew that he did not want to enter the tunnel. But, he found himself inside, floating to the end. He then saw a door at the end of the tunnel. Light was illuminating from behind. Somehow he knew that if he went through that door he would never come back.

Rob then pleaded with God, "Please, please. I'm not done yet. Can I come back?" Rob then made a promise to God. He would attend church every Sunday and worship as a Christian.

The next thing Rob knew was that he was in a hospital emergency room. He had broken his neck – the C1 vertebrae which nearly always results in death. And he knew he had met the Holy Spirit.

He was put in a brace for five months. After this, he was flown to Mountain View for surgery. He had to go through tests, including a particularly distasteful x-ray. After all this was done, the surgeon asked him what he wanted to do. “Huh? What do I want to do,” he thought.

The surgeon then told him he had two choices – to take the neck brace off and throw it in his garbage can, or take it home for a souvenir. The vertebrae had not healed, but scar tissue surrounded it, making it stronger than before the accident.

Rob kept his promise to God as a practicing Christian. He attends church every Sunday. He added something to his deal with God - he asks a lot of questions.

Is this story an image or a vision? I'd say it's a miracle and a vision.

Today I am happy to tell you Rob remains happily married for 56 years to his high school sweetheart, has a dog he loves, is a quilter and is on the golf course every spare minute he has.

Why have I told you these stories? They are clear examples of images and visions that we do not ignore. The rock formations in Colorado are *images* and Rob's story is a *vision*.

Sometimes when we encounter something we do not know or understand we dismiss it. Or perhaps we simply ignore it. Or we may misinterpret the experience.

Today we are going to look at the transfiguration, or transformation, of Christ. What a wonder-filled experience for Peter, James and John! They had climbed the mountain with Jesus to pray. Imagine witnessing Elijah and Moses, long dead, talking to Jesus! What does this mean? His entire appearance was so white that it glowed and figuratively blinded them. Then they heard a voice, the voice of God, speak through a cloud that enveloped them, saying “This is my son, and I love him. Listen to him!” As the disciples looked around they only saw Jesus. This was the first time it was revealed that Jesus himself is the Son of God. Jesus then instructed the disciples to say nothing of their experience until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Peter doesn't quite understand the meaning of what has occurred when he witnessed Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah. He tries to prolong the experience by wanting to make three

shelters for Elijah, Moses and Jesus. He was afraid of what he was seeing in the transformed Jesus. Can you identify with Peter?

What did the disciples learn from this? It was indeed a mountain top experience and God was with them, just as God is always present in our own lives. The disciples saw a vision, a new way to see, and new understanding of Jesus. They could see far into the future with the transfiguration of Jesus – so far that Jesus' instruction to the disciples combined with the transfiguration experience may have led them and possibly us to see the transfiguration as a preparation for the cross and resurrection.

Jesus with his disciples following him descended the mountain. They knew that their mission was not to live on the mountaintop forever, but to serve and minister to the needy – both physically and spiritually.

By this transfiguration account, God has assured us there is much more beyond waiting for us, much more within us that can emerge and be realized.

Not all mountain top experiences must occur on a mountain. Think of times in your life when experiences could not be understood. By your faith you put your trust in God's hand. Just as the disciples were being prepared for the future, you were being prepared for the future. The cloud of your life experiences lifts and your perspective is changed. You can see the events of your life clearly and meaningfully as they all fit together. It is then that you see God's purpose for your life and how all of the pieces of the puzzle fit together. But having said that all mountain top experiences do not have to occur on a mountain can you look at yourself as climbing the mountain of life?

Our faith calls us to do good things, and show love and care for one another. But our faith calls for much more. We are called to yearn to see God and experience His power... it is being touched by the Holy Spirit... it is hearing the voice of God whispering in our ear.

This is what makes our faith so rich and fulfilling to our souls. Hear and feel the special moments and the special touches that only God can give!

Go forward and take the challenge – climb the mountain of your life!

Be open to hearing God! If we open our eyes, we will know that whatever our experiences may be, God is always with us.

Amen

Song of Response

Please stand as you are able to sing the hymn of response “Holy Ground” found on the insert in your bulletin.

Offertory

Will the ushers please come forward. (sit until end of Lori’s offertory)

Doxology

Let us pray.

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit we thank you for the gifts of the people. We give thanks for the generosity of these gifts and ask that we use them wisely as we are intentionally welcoming, continue our mission work and develop ourselves with our education and spirituality programs. Amen

Please join in singing our closing hymn, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” #717 in the United Methodist Hymnal, verses 1-3.

Blessing and Sending Forth

God be in your head, and in your understanding.

God be in your eyes, and in your looking.

God be in your heart, and in your thinking.

God be at your end, and in your departing.

Amen