

“God Sightings”  
Luke 9:28-43  
Transfiguration Sunday  
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With the transfiguration things begin to get clear about Jesus. No more parables or mysterious sayings. The transfiguration and the voice from heaven is about as clear as you can get. Jesus, you see now, will be like Moses, setting God’s people free, this time from fear, death, and the devil. Jesus, this shining reveals, will be like Elijah, accomplishing mighty deeds, bridging heaven and earth. And the voice from heaven confirms that Jesus will go beyond and replace both Moses and Elijah.

All this may be clear to Peter, James, or John. Overwhelmed, you could call them. For they are but ordinary people witnessing an extraordinary event. But at least they got to witness it, this God sighting. What do we get?

Some time before – just last week as we have read the texts -- Jesus has approached Peter, the fisherman, as he is washing his nets. This guy has a real job. He has had a bad day (or night) at work. Peter is a straight shooter. He signals his resistance to Jesus’ comments about putting down nets yet again. He’s not afraid of saying to Jesus, “We’ll do it, but it sounds like a bad idea to me.”

Suddenly, it is apparent to Peter and the others that Jesus knows a little something about fishing as well. Peter is overwhelmed. There is no false modesty here, just the sigh, “I am a sinner.” By saying this Peter is not admitting to some naughtiness in his past. Sin is more of a spiritual matter than a moral issue. Peter is admitting that he usually doesn’t believe in stuff like this. You know, God stuff. Peter went to work, just like he always did, and God showed up. That story isn’t about fish at all. The call of Peter is about God showing up where ordinary people live and work. You could call it a God sighting.

And now, on this mountain, here is this illuminating experience. Now it is becoming clearer to Peter and James and John who Jesus really is. And Peter is just as amazed, bewildered, and overcome as when he was first called. A God-sighting. On the Mount of the Transfiguration, just try and avoid it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s advice to pastors was to never “judge the text.”<sup>1</sup> You’re not supposed to begin your sermon by saying that this is a “hard” text, or a “favorite” text. And you are certainly not supposed to say it is a text you don’t like. Well, I’m breaking Bonhoeffer’s advice.

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<sup>1</sup> “A Lecture on Preaching from 1938/1939,” Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975), p. 179.

Of course the disciples miss something in this shining. But at least they were there. At least they could put it together later on, on their way down the mountain. But you and I are at even further remove. What do we get? We're just reading about it.

And that may be what is annoying in the transfiguration. On one hand I envy the disciples who witnessed such assurance, such proof about Jesus. And then on the other hand I find that I resent it that all these spectacular Bible stories were for them, and only get to you and me through a tortured historical process. Clarity may be a possibility for these few disciples. But what do we get?

Last week Jesus showed up at Peter's office on the beach. Peter went to work, and Jesus showed up. Peter went fishing, and God showed up. Apparently there were God sightings far from the religious temple. Maybe that's what we get.

As your pastor I can assure you that God will show up in this worship service. God promises to show up here in word and in sacrament. It would not be unusual for us to have God sightings here.

I can also assure you that God will show up in your ordinary life this week. I can't tell you exactly where God will show up, but God will show up. God will not wait until next Sunday for you to do "religious things." God will somehow be there: in the client who comes to see you, in the student you teach, in the boss who bothers you, in your spouse (no matter how long you have been married), in some annoying disruption of your routine, in the predictability of your routine. God will show up. God will show up in your questions, your confusions, your aims, your frustrations, your deepest loves and in your nagging grudges. And there God will nudge, forgive, point, engage, lead, and redeem you. God will show up. That's what we get.

I can't in good conscience recommend that you go out and cook up a transfiguration for yourself like Jesus', because his was just for him. And just like with Peter, James, and John you and I will continue to scratch our heads about Jesus' transfiguration. No wonder they all never said anything about what happened up on the mountain. But perhaps for us it will have to be small transfigurations, you know, small God sightings.

Right after that bright transfiguration, Jesus and these three disciples came down the mountain. They are confronted with a boy with a demon. Not healed immediately will he be. There are convulsions and writhings on the way. "And all were astounded at what Jesus did."

*After* the transfiguration, that brief moment of clarity and purpose, God showed up again right away in the healing of a possessed boy. After the transfiguration, as they were moving among ordinary people, they had a God sighting. If you were to ask them all, they might attest to a God sighting that day.

We shall have to be content with reading about Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus' transfiguration makes plain that he is greater than even Moses and Elijah. It even makes plain that Jesus goes

not to accomplish an *exodus* in Jerusalem. The disciples may misunderstand or even resist Jesus' purpose and destination, but after this there can be no more missing it all together.

But we, like the disciples and the great crowds who followed Jesus when the transfiguration faded into history, may watch for little transfigurations in our lives. God will show up there. God may clear up some confusion, heal some impediment, forgive some unbelief, restore a relationship, urge some bold action, show the way to some great giving – but God will show up.

As this season of epiphany closes our God sightings will not end as well. Now we shall see him in all manner of ordinariness. Now we shall see him go to Jerusalem and by a cross accomplish some great *exodus* among us.

And on the way, in ordinary lives, God sightings will continue. Your homework for the week is to watch for God sightings. And be astounded at the greatness of God. Amen.