Since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory

A few years ago I spent a long weekend in Bodega Bay. The ocean is one of my favorite places, but I hadn’t been there in a while. One afternoon we went for a long walk on the beach. After some time, my companions were ready to head back. I wasn’t. “I just want to go a little farther……” I was in the place I most clearly know God’s presence and I wanted to soak up every drop of it.

It is good for us to be here. Let us build three dwellings....

In our gospel today, Peter the impetuous one is so overcome by the sight of God’s glory that he doesn’t even know what he’s saying. He wants to hang on to this amazing experience.

After all here he is witnessing Jesus transfigured, his clothes dazzling white, shining with the radiance that has been the sign of God’s presence all throughout the Hebrew Scripture, with Moses, the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet

Who wouldn’t want to hang on to that experience
Make at least a little longer
Maybe keep it for themselves?

But Peter has missed the point. (As he so often does)

Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and were with Jesus speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Greek word for departure is exodos - an exit or death. Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his death on the Cross
That what’s he was going to accomplish at Jerusalem.
God’s glory, the visible presence of the Holy One comes not for the purpose of a mountain top experience but to set the context for Jesus’ exodus journey to Jerusalem.

We can’t be too hard on Peter though
Peter is the disciple who demonstrates our human foibles.
Wanting to stay in the glorious mountain top experience
Caught in our fear blurting out the first thing that comes to mind
Weighed down with exhaustion so we hardly know what we are saying or doing

When we shake our heads at Peter it’s because we recognize in him a part of ourselves
Those moments when we open our mouths and promptly insert our feet
When our words simply do not come out the way we intended

Perhaps because we’re tired from following Jesus up the mountain
Perhaps because we’re too afraid to know what we’re saying
Perhaps because this experience of God’s glory, this glimpse of holiness isn’t what we bargained for
It’s all not turning out the way we expected and we’re confused and overwhelmed.

Peter’s experience there on the mountain
Is often our experience of encountering the Holy

Unexpected, Confusing, terrifying
Life changing
A moment we either want to cling to or run from in fear
And we mistake the moment for the destination
We forget we’re called to follow Jesus back down to the valley.

The cloud which overshadowed the disciples evokes the images of the cloud which led the Israelites on their exodus journey. Peter James and John would have recognized the cloud as a sign of God’s presence even before hearing the divine voice. Surely God is in this place.

God led the Israelites through the exodus, speaking to them from the pillar of cloud (Ps 99:7) God spoke to the disciples in the cloud which overshadowed them. And then there was only Jesus.
Jesus, who had been too bright to look at just a few moments before

Jesus, whom they were to follow down from the mountaintop on his journey to Jerusalem,
To his exodus, his departure where God’s glory would be revealed.
Jesus, the one we follow to the Cross.
Jesus, into whose likeness we are changed from glory to glory

So where do we see God’s glory?

We see glory in the face of those who have encountered God. Moses’ face shone from his experience of God on the mountain. Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of Peter James and John as he was praying. Glory shows up when we stop and meet the Holy.

Where do we meet the Holy?
Where do you find your heart saying “surely the presence of the Lord is in this place?”

Often we say that about our mountaintop experiences
Weddings, graduations, baptisms
Experiencing beautiful music in worship,

We meet the Holy One as well in the valleys.
God’s glory shows up in the broken places in our lives, individually and as a society.
Paul reminds us that God’s glory dwells in each one of us. That we all are being transformed from one degree of glory to another.

We encounter the Holy as we meet Christ in one another. Like Peter and the disciples we have to stay awake to see God’s glory at work, especially here in the valleys in the often painfully broken places in our world.

Like Peter we sometimes want to stay in the holy places we know, to stay with the experience of the holy that’s comfortable.

God calls us out – to transformation, to a new vision to see holiness in each person we meet, Each person who shows us the face of Christ, The homeless person, the angry person, Those who look or sound or think differently than we do. All reflect the Holy One. We hold the treasure of God’s glory in the earthen vessels of our selves and of our social structures. Sometimes, its hard to see God’s glory shining through We need new vision

We need “the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know the hope to which God has called us, ...and the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...”

Staying awake enough to see clearly in the valley is hard work. On our own exodus journey we have to let go of our narrow vision, of our expectations about how and when and where the Holy One is manifest, of our inability to see God’s glory reflected in the faces of all our siblings.

We especially need our hearts enlightened to see the Holy One at work when we come up hard against the brokenness and oppression in our world. This week we’ve had ample examples of brokenness and reasons for hope.
The decision of the United Methodist General Conference to exclude their LGBTQ siblings and the systemic factors which contributed to the shooting of Stephon Clark both cry out for transformation.

Today before we enter into the transformative journey of Lent, we will renew our baptismal promises, joining with Abby, who will be baptized at the 9 am service. We will promise again to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being.

As we renew those promises, let us also examine who we exclude, how our society puts people in boxes and what actions we must take to persevere in resisting evil, renouncing the "evil powers of the world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God."
For surely the Holy One is present when we identify and examine the barriers that divide us, take actions to build relationships and break down those barriers in search of justice.

So before we head down the mountain, we come here. We come to be nourished by Word and song, bread and wine
To see the face of Christ in one another
To pray for enlightened hearts and transformed vision
To be sent on our exodus journey
In the valleys where we’ll encounter God’s glory
Shining forth in the face of every single person.

May the Most High and glorious God grant us right faith, certain hope, perfect charity, deep insight, and clear vision of Christ made manifest not on the mountain, but here in the valley
As together we journey to the Cross and beyond.

Amen. +

~Karen Lawler, OEF