

**Exodus 34: 29-35**

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

**Luke 9: 28-36**

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

**“The Heart Shaped Box”****Rev. Joel Kershaw****February 14, 2010**

So we're here. We have arrived. We have survived Advent and Christmas. We have witnessed Epiphany and outlasted January. We've even canonized a few saints - of the football world, of course. I apologize to you Colt fans. It's hard to believe that we're only two months into 2010, for all that's happened, and at the same time it's hard to believe that we're already two months into 2010, and here we are on the doorstep of Lent, encountering what is one of the most unusual stories of Jesus' time with his disciples. In our account of Jesus' time on earth, there seems to be much we could probably make sense of. He teaches people about morals and God and religious practice. Jesus heals people and performs signs, and travels, and challenges the status quo, sure. He tells stories and lives out his teaching and even faces death, you bet. But right in the middle of all of this that we might be able to make some sense, we find this rather unusual story of the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration. Jesus grabs a few of his friends and heads up the mountain to pray a bit.

Now, the disciples are, as usual, very clueless as to what they will encounter on that mountain, but we can hardly blame them. Jesus made a habit of climbing the mountains around him, to pray to God, just as Moses did. But when they got there, they realized they were in for more than just some prayer. Before you know it though, they were asleep, as was also their habit. You might remember in a few passages to come in Lent, the disciples falling asleep on the job while Jesus prays at Gethsemane in the garden before he's arrested. They hike up that mountain and it's so uninteresting to the disciples that they can't remain conscious, but by the end, they're going to wish they had. For when they wake up, they are still weighted down with sleep. That's a clever Bible way of saying they were awake, but couldn't move. And there they were, looking at Jesus, their teacher, their leader and friend, talking with two of the most important figures in the Jewish faith, Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, the great prophet of God.

Now, our text states that Peter called out to Jesus, and he says, "Master, it is good that we are here. Master, it is good that we are here." Now, I cannot be sure, but I would be willing to bet every square inch of my very large diploma that Peter was really asking a question. It wasn't about statement. Instead of "Master, it is good that we are here." More like, "Master, are you sure we need to be here? This is kind of scary. Are you sure we couldn't rather be maybe be helping with firewood, or doing something else much more productive, because we have no idea what's happening." Did you ever feel like that? Have you ever been disoriented, turned around, uncomfortable, out of sorts? "I think I left something in the car, let me go check" kind of moments? Where you just feel like you're out of place? These kinds of moments happen a lot on youth trips, as I've discovered in five years. I was in my office this morning grappling with which story to tell you about feeling uncomfortable on a youth trip, and decided there were at least two front-runners you had to hear. The first came when we went to Chicago a couple of years ago. We went to Humboldt Part United Methodist Church and we helped out with their homeless ministries, and we were pulling in, second day of travel, it had been a long day, hadn't stopped for dinner, so we were going to eat in the soup kitchen that the church serves six nights a week. We pull in to a part of Chicago... I had never been to Chicago at all, but I can guarantee that none of our group had ever been to this part of Chicago, ever. We pull in to this sort of dilapidated-looking community, we park our church van and the other cars along the street in front of this church that looks like an apartment building, and we meet in the courtyard. We hadn't gone to the bathroom in a while, because I'm not fond of bathroom breaks when we're traveling, so the kids were ready to use the restroom, and they were hungry, and there we were in this courtyard, gathering. We were met by this guy that was to lead us through the week, and he said, "They're ready for you, go on down, the line is already forming." So we went down and found bathrooms you might not want to use. The door was a little crooked, and didn't hang quite straight in the doorframe. And we got our food. It was delicious. Great cook at that soup kitchen, six days a week is their ministry. But we were sore thumbs in that room. We were a bunch of teenagers from Colorado, eating dinner with about 80 homeless people from Chicago. "Are you sure we're supposed to be here? Is it good for us to be here?" And yet it was.

The other time feeling a little uncomfortable was last summer on the mission trip. We went to Crow Creek Reservation with the youth, doing some work there with the native peoples. On our last day of work, the work coordinator comes around and says, "You know, there's a pow-wow that's going to happen tonight, a couple miles from where you've been staying. Why don't you check it out? And so we did. We loaded up in the van, and off we went after dinner. We found our way to the pow-wow, and it was this big circle of structures in this grassy field in the middle, and on one edge of the circle there was an announcer's booth, like a football stadium in a small town would have for the announcer calling the plays, and this colorful character was in there on the microphone, calling out the different dances they were going to do and introducing the tribes that had traveled to be at the pow-wow and all of the different dancers that were going to be dancing for us that night, and we just sort of took it all in. We didn't really belong there, but they invited us, and so we were sort of taking it all in. And then we heard the announcers say, "Now, we want all the youth groups who have been working on the reservations to gather by the announcer's booth, we want to introduce you. Tell the people about the work you've been doing." So we gathered over by the sound booth and we listened as the leader of our group told the bit about what we were doing and who we were helping and all sorts of things, and then the announcer says, "And our friends are going to be leading us in our next dance." I don't dance, just so you know. I learned to play the guitar so I wouldn't have to dance. And here we are leading. The kids took right to it. The youth just jumped right out, they had a great time. I, on the other hand, felt uncomfortable to say the least. Uncomfortable. Have you ever been in a place like that? "Are you sure we're supposed to be here? Is it good that we're here?"

Now, you and I and any person with any sense know that Peter was not quite as calm and collected as the Gospels would have us believe, as he wakes up to see Jesus talking with Elijah and Moses. His next suggestion of course is, "We're going to build three dwellings here, Jesus, one for each of you. We'll build them." It's kind of like Peter's fishing for Jesus to respond, you know? If he throws out any idea, no matter how foolish, maybe Jesus will turn around and explain what's happening, because he sure doesn't know. And if that wasn't bad enough, just as soon as they start getting accustomed to their heavenly apparitions, a cloud appears around them and starts talking to them, and what are three ex-fishermen to do? "Is it good for us to be here, Master?"

I really like the disciples. I really do. They really are clueless. If you read the accounts of the disciples in the Gospels, you find that they really are clueless. They have no idea what's happening, they have no idea what Jesus is telling them. They always ask the dumbest questions. They always argue over the silly, meaningless stuff. They stumble into the worst situations you can imagine, but the reason I like them is because we can sure relate to them, can't we? A whole lot better than we can Jesus. Sure, Jesus is healing people and teaching people about love and God and how we're to behave with each other and how we're to be people of God, but it's really the disciples who are a whole lot more like us. We aspire to rise above our disciple-like traits, but most of the time, we're just as clueless as the original twelve, trying to find our way to God. And like the disciples, we all have times in our lives when we sort of blindly stumble into situations that end up

transforming our lives, that end up inspiring and transforming our faith. That was Camp Hope for me. Camp Hope was that transformative stumble that I made.

I was 11 years old. My father was the registrar of the camp, and he managed people's forms as they sent in their information and their checks and all their stuff, and so he was able to slip me in. My first time going I actually went as a camper because I was too young, but at 12 you were supposed to be able to go as a junior counselor, and you'd be teamed up with some other counselor there at camp, and you'd sort of help them with their camper. So I went. We traveled all the way from Ray, Colorado, which is about five hours to Buckhorn, way out on the plains, that's where my dad was, and when we got there I really had no idea what I was in for. My dad had worked at camp for a decade at that point, and he would tell me stories, but I really had no idea what I was in for. The campers at Camp Hope are people who have developmental disabilities, and they have all kinds of ailments that 11-year-old boys know nothing about, really. The camper that my dad took care of was in a wheelchair, couldn't really move his arms or his legs and needed help to feed himself, and didn't have much of teeth because he ground them in his sleep, so they were just sort of little nubs in his jaw. But he was a happy guy. He had trouble with incontinence, so he had to have a diaper, and he struggled to really do much of anything. Not things I was used to dealing with. And the camp had all kinds of people, with all kinds of problems. Of course, they were all happier than most of us are, but there they were. Scary for an 11-year-old boy. I had no idea what I was getting into. But at 11 years old, though I had no idea how that first week would not only change my life, change how I looked at life, but changed how my faith and life would unfold.

When wondering, wandering down our complicated, twisted, sometimes treacherous paths, we come to times in live when we find ourselves asking, "Is it good for me to be here?" I don't remember, but I'm sure I asked it that week at least once. "Is it good for me to be here?" There are times when an answer might change our course. When our answer turns out to be "No," we hope it changes our course. But there are times even when they're uncomfortable that we find ourselves compelled to say "Yes, it is good for me to be here. I'm not sure why, but it's good." We might not always know right away. Like the disciples, at the end of that scripture, they go off and they don't tell anybody about it at all, in those times. They didn't know what to make of the Transfiguration. But they eventually told the story. They eventually recognized, only years later, with all the benefit of hindsight, they began to realize that it was in fact good for them to be there on that mountain that day. Like our disciple friends, we can come to a place when we can claim our experiences and name them good. We find a way to set aside our fear that weighs us down, and stand up, and proclaim that it is indeed good for us to be here, wherever "here" might be for you. Looking back on my experience at camp, it couldn't have changed my life any more, I don't think. It's where I met some of my best friends. It's where I had some of my best memories. It's why, whenever I preach for you on Camp Hope Sunday I never have trouble conjuring up the memories of Camp Hope. They're just as fresh as if they were yesterday. It's where I learned to play guitar, so I wouldn't have to dance. It's where I met my wife, and found love. It's where I learned how to follow God. It's where I chose to serve God, all at Camp Hope.

Now, I didn't choose all that at age 11, but you get my point. It started. It started with camp. That new and strange and at times scary week that I spent with the most compassionate, most inspiring, God-serving people-loving people, set my life on a new path, and I didn't need the last 20 years to tell me it was good. Once we overcome the fear that holds us back, and discover those thin places for ourselves, those places between, that divide between God and us is very thin. When we discover those thin places, and we discover the courage to echo Peter and say "It is good that we are here, it is good that we are here, Master." Those times when our answer is "Yes, yes, it is good for us to be here" our job is not over. We are not yet done.

Have you ever been in a moment you wish you could stay in forever? Have you ever had an experience you wish would never end? I have. I'm sure it's a big surprise that it happened at camp, on Camp Hope Sunday. It was my last year of working as a counselor for Camp Hope, and there was a young woman who was cooking in the kitchen that summer, and about the second week of camp I finally got the courage up to ask for her number. So I wandered up on a Friday, we had packed up everything and the campers were long gone and we were just having a meal before we finished cleaning up the cabins and went home, and I wandered up to the counter and I asked Abby for her number. Thank God, she gave it to me. I still have the slip of paper she wrote it on. We finished our chores and I drove down the mountain, about 35, 40 minutes to Fort Collins. I went to my apartment and unpacked my stuff and took a shower and I called her. I said, "Can I see you?" She said, "I don't have a car." So I got back in my truck, I drove back up the mountain I had just drive down, and I met her, and we went for a walk. If you've ever been up to Buckhorn, it's a beautiful place up in the mountains. Trees everywhere, rocks and paths and roads, you can go for hours. And we did. We just walked and talked, and we walked some more, and we talked some more. The whole afternoon. I never wanted that to end, because I knew at that moment I had met the woman I would marry. I knew at that moment that I was in love. I wanted to hold onto it.

When we encounter the stuff of life that inspires us, when we fall in love, when we hold a child for the first time, when we try something scary, or achieve something lofty, when we reach a distant milestone, when we find ourselves in those places in our lives when it seems the barrier between the mortal and the divine has been worn thin, and you swear you can sense God, it's only natural for us to want to stay there. Natural for us to want to make those experiences last forever. Like the disciples on that mountain, we want to set up shop in those thin places, build our dwelling places in hopes that God might allow us to dwell there, in that moment, forever. It is also of course sometimes a cruel side to nature that we can never remain there. We must inevitably move on. They cannot last forever, and so we are left wondering, what are we to do with these experiences? What do we do with these encounters with God?

It seems to me we have three choices. We can either ignore it, and pretend it didn't happen, and couldn't possible have changed anything about how we view the world and our place in it. Good luck with that. Or you could spend your time longing to return to that place and try to re-create it, or find another, to go in search of those thin places. But you can't find them. You can seek them all you want, but you can't find them, because

God tends to find us, especially when we're not looking. God tends to find us even when we might be lost somewhere. And when we happen upon a glimpse of the Ultimate, and find the courage to claim it as good, we are then to ask, "Now where? Where are we going now, God? What's in store?" Jesus would not let those disciples dwell in that moment, for he knew there was much to be done. It was not enough to have a heavenly rendezvous with a couple of spiritual icons. There was more to the story. There is always more to the story. And you know something? There is always more to our story. The mountaintops of life, those thin places, give us a chance to see what has been, and what is possible. The valleys may seem deep, but no matter how high we climb or how far we fall, there is always more to the story. There is always more to the story, and there's always more to our story, and God will be there, loving us, when we find the courage to turn the page. Amen.