

*Let us pray: Lord, show us your glory, that we may tell of your salvation.*

How have you experienced the last two months, as we've walked the Way of Love? Have you been more intentional about your spiritual life? Worked some new spiritual practices into your life?

We started that journey on the Feast of Epiphany, likening the road ahead to the one the magi traveled, following that star to find Jesus.

And here, at the end of the season, the end of our 9-week pilgrimage, we find ourselves with three other travelers – Peter, James and John, on the heights as Jesus is revealed as God.

Hikes up mountains are a combination of exertion, exhilaration, and exhaustion. So is the spiritual life, as we participate in what God is inviting us into. Our Way of Love effort may have been like that. Did you have any high points?

We often call our spiritual high points "mountain-top experiences," when we feel very close to God, or experience something miraculous, or are overcome by an awareness of how much God loves us.

The curtains part, and for a moment the membrane separating this world and the other becomes wafer-thin.

That's called an "epiphany," a revelation of what is most real, most true.

That's why this season after Christmas is called "Epiphany," because one after another, the reality of who God is in Jesus Christ was being revealed – first his birth, then the magi, then his baptism, his first miracle, his ministry.

And we always end this season with this story, of Jesus taking his closest disciples with him up a mountain, and there being transfigured before them, his face changing, his clothes a dazzling white, like he becomes pure light.

Then cloud covers them suddenly, and out of the cloud the voice of God, so like the voice heard at Jesus' baptism: "*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*"

It's like God is saying, "I've told you before who he is; I'm telling you again, and I want you to listen to what he says.

Because things are going to happen, that aren't going to make any sense to you..."

Much later, when Jesus' departure did come, and then his rising, Peter, James and John would have this collective memory – shared by three witnesses, as the law demanded – so no one would think he was delusional. It must have been an amazing experience, the dazzlingly bright Jesus, with Moses, Elijah; Moses representing the Law of God, and Elijah, as the foremost of God's prophets, signifying that strand of revelation to Israel. Both of these figures had encounters with God on mountains: They signified to the watching disciples that Jesus was in line with God had been doing all along, that he was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. There was Israel's history... and here, his face blinding light, was Israel's future, The world's future. *"This is my Son, my Chosen: Listen to him!"* No wonder Peter wanted to build a few booths and capture the whole thing the ultimate mountain-top moment.

I once went on a retreat, and after some days of reading and praying and going to worship, reading, praying and going to worship, I was in a rhythm. But about the third day, praying the chapel, I found myself in a conversation with Jesus, which was unfolding as I wrote it down. And he got it through to me for the first time how much God loved me. I grew up in the church, but I never till that moment really understood that God loved me. I ran out into this apple orchard they had at the convent, and just ran around it, exulting in my knowledge that God loved me. Who wants to leave that?

But we don't stay on the mountain top, the real ones or the spiritual ones. Our reading from Exodus begins: *"When Moses came down the mountain..."* Down the mountain is where we live. Up the mountain, Moses was face to face with God, and his face glowed with the God's reflected glory, but what he met at the bottom was fear and bewilderment. Up the mountain, Peter, James and John saw a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature as his face shone with the actual glory of God... but what they met when they came down the mountain was a damaged child, a distraught father, an anxious crowd, and their frustrated fellow-disciples, unable to exercise the power of God the way Jesus taught them to.

And down the mountain, Jesus' human nature was evident – he was cranky. Faced with what appears to be the faithlessness or incompetence of his chosen disciples, he says, "How much longer must I be with you and put up with you!"

But even here, down the mountain, he shows us who God is,  
what God's power looks like, what God's healing love can do.  
In the mess of a volatile crowd, in the face of the damage that evil can do to the  
human body and spirit, in spite of the faithlessness of even his close followers,  
Jesus reveals God down the mountain as well as on it.  
He casts out the demon, heals the child, and reveals the power of God's love.

And guess what? Jesus is still doing it, here in this place, out there in the world.  
Only now he does it through us, his disciples-in-training in this world,  
His apostles-in-the-making.  
Sometimes we glimpse Jesus in glory, and other times we see Him in one another,  
and in the people with whom we break the bread in His name.

And in seeing Him, we also are being Him, becoming so like Him that others will  
see Him in us. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about Moses and his veil:

*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected  
in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory  
to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

That's a promise, a promise for "down the mountain."

That transfiguration, "face-changing" that Peter, James and John beheld –  
is gradually happening to us, spiritually, as we take on the likeness of Christ.  
The purpose of the spiritual practices we cultivate as we walk the Way of Love,  
or some other rule of life, is to become most fully who God made us to be,  
which paradoxically means we end up looking more like Jesus.

Like Moses, our faces will come to reflect the glory of God, until God is all we show.

We put all this extra effort into the Way of Love, adding spiritual practices to  
our days and weeks, and what's next? Graduation? No, more! More of them.  
But they're only practices until we perfect them. Once they've become habit,  
second nature, we don't even have to think about them. We add more.  
And soon enough we discover we've changed on the inside,  
and see the world differently than we used to.

We become transformed, and agents of transformation for others,  
as we take on the likeness of Christ.

God has a purpose for you, and wants to give you his peace, his presence and his  
power. That's what awaits us down the mountain. Practice makes perfect.

*Amen.*

**Luke 9:28-43**

About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, 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.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

**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. Afterward 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.