

This is for the adults - - -





Mark 9:2-9
Year B

<https://www.facebook.com/Biblword/videos/1543595245706059/>

A couple of days ago, a video that snagged the attention of my '90s baby heart: [Green Day performing "American Idiot" on a New York City Subway platform](#). The lyrics transported me back to my seventh-grade self, clad in Aeropostale, my eyes outlined in thick black. I could tell the large crowd felt similarly, everyone singing the 2004

anthem at the top of their lungs, arms extended with their phones recording the scene.

It looked fun! And the scene reminded me of another video I saw recently from New Year's Eve in Paris. With the Arc de Triomphe displaying the final countdown, the video shows a sea of phones, everyone recording the moment rather than hugging or kissing their loved ones.

This is the world we live in. The impulse to record and share, building up our digital presentations of self, is strong, but it's not exactly something new. This week's Gospel passage reminds me that the human desire to contain moments existed before modern technology, residing deep in our marrow.

Peter demonstrates this in Mark 9:2-9 when he offers to build three separate tabernacles for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. His offer is both a recognition of the holy and an attempt to contain it. I love Peter's bumbling response because this would be exactly my impulse. After recognizing that I was experiencing something beyond my understanding, I would reach out to catch and hold it.

The moment on the mountain was miraculous. The disciples get a glimpse of the divinity that resides in Jesus 'fully human flesh, and they are terrified (v. 6). Then clouds descend and God addresses Peter, James and

John in the darkness with a version of God's message to Jesus at his baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (v. 7).

As I read this week's Gospel passage, I wonder about the human response to divine revelations. What do we do when we encounter something that fills us with wonder – that bubbly, contradictory mix of expansiveness and finitude and interconnectedness?

I have a hard time imagining myself on that mountaintop. How can I even begin to picture the glory of God? Preachers may consider listing other images to make the passage more relatable. As I write this, I look at modern iconographer Kelly Latimore's "[Mary: Love Forever Being Born](#)," depicting the mother of God with a robe full of stars. Perhaps the disciples felt like staring into the vastness of space when they beheld Christ's revelation. Perhaps it felt like that gush of adrenaline, gratitude and relief when a deer runs in front of your car, and you break in time. Perhaps it felt like looking through a microscope for the first time and seeing the order of cells.

It probably felt like all these things and more. The disciples seem to be both afraid and drawn in. The offer to build tabernacles expresses a desire for permanence. Maybe they didn't want to leave the mountaintop. Yet, today's passage teaches us something important about a life of faith. We are not to stay on the mountaintop. God instructs us to listen to Christ, and just a chapter earlier, Christ said,

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:24). We are to go out into the world.

There is a reason that we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday before we enter Lent. As artist, author and Methodist minister Jan Richardson writes, “The rhythm of the Christian year offers its own thresholds, inviting us to enter into a deeper awareness of the God who dwells both within and beyond chronological time.” Encountering God on the mountaintop, experiencing wonder, is a liminal space. Transfiguration Sunday is a threshold that gives us a glimpse into a world that exists beyond the confines of our humanity. It provides context and vision. The Transfiguration thus prepares us to come to terms with our soil nature, our utter dependence on God before Ash Wednesday and Lent.

That is what is coming. But for today, we are on the mountaintop. And I wonder if the right invitation for some churches is not to jump ahead to Ash Wednesday and Lent or the cross, but to stay on the mountain and reflect on our reactions to divine revelations. Do we reach for our phones to record the sunset, the view, the baby’s face that took shape in nine short months? Do we seek to contain wonder? To understand awe?

It seems to me that we are given a model for how to deal with wonder by the ancient Israelites wandering the desert and our request in the Lord’s Prayer. What would happen

if we accepted wonder as our daily bread, never collecting more than they needed? What would happen if we trusted that God would reveal God's self to us? Would we be free to drink wonder more deeply? Would we relinquish our need for control?

Our encounters with wonder give us context for God's vastness and vision. We are meant to take that knowledge with us into our everyday lives, back down in the valleys of life. But let's not rush it. For today, let's enjoy the view from the mountain, drinking in wonder as if it were vital (because it is).

Questions:

1. When have you experienced wonder? What was your reaction in that moment?
2. Do you think God continues to reveal God's self to us? How?
3. How do you think the Transfiguration stands as a threshold between Epiphany and Lent?