

SPIRITUAL SIGHT

The story of the mountain top transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-9) resists explanation. But it invites the reader into an experience of mystery and discovery. What do we do and feel when we go to a mountain top? How do we react to the spectacular view before and around us? How do we connect this experience of beauty with the valley below, with the world of every day? The story of the transfiguration of Jesus is an invitation to a new way of seeing. As we respond to this invitation and begin to focus through the lens of this incredible story, we find ourselves reflecting on how we view the world, life, God, and much more. Mountain top experiences afford a different angle of vision. They encourage us to see the world as God's creation, valuable in its own right. Our secular culture tends to see the world primarily for its usefulness. Even people are valued largely for what they can produce. God values what He has created, values us not for what we can or may do, but for who we are, His children

Seeking to see as God sees requires a major transformation, a transfiguration, because it means looking not just at the world, but also at God. This is very difficult for us humans. Our limited nature can only sense the otherness of God. So the mountain top becomes more than leaving the office behind, shutting off the T.V., forgetting about politics, and more than witnessing marvelous vistas. This is about experiences that are so strange, so mysterious and so unbelievable, that we don't know how to feel, think, or act. On the mountain top Jesus was transfigured; He was seen in his otherness, seen illumined by glory, seen connected with the long history of God's people represented by Moses and Elijah. What do we do when we see the glory? What do we do at the mountain top?

Peter was impressed by the spectacular, but only as a spectator. He was not transformed. So he wanted to capture it, take a snapshot of it, take the dynamic glory out of it. "Let's turn this spot into a permanent camp site." Obviously, he didn't see the larger picture, didn't make the connection between His baptism, forgot what Jesus had said about suffering and death before resurrection glory, forgot about the distant valley below.

New sight requires letting go of old ways of seeing and letting God reveal. As Paul puts it: What no eye has seen...God has revealed through the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

Spiritual seeing requires a spiritual conversion. When Peter proposes setting up camp, a dense cloud interrupts his suggestion. The splendor disappears and a voice declares: "This is my Beloved Son. Listen to him." Then they are alone with Jesus. He is still the light shining in the darkness revealing God and His love. Eventually Peter and the others let go and see, but only when they see the glory in the valley, especially in the valley of the shadow of death.

The mountain top enables us to see and feel the world as God sees and feels it. The glory beyond us connects us with the brokenness and need around us.

The Rev. Bert Eaton is Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church , located at 503 W. Broad St. in Swansboro.