

**Good Shepherd**  
**Year A; Transfiguration; 8/6/2017**  
***Luke 9:28-36***  
***“His face shown with brightness”***

Have you ever been to a place that was so dynamic that you could feel the specialness or silence or peacefulness of it?

Perhaps it was a park, a garden, a waterfall, a woods, an historical site that contained the quiet of the past, an abandoned commune, a mountain, a retreat center, a place of great memories or the such.

Perhaps, the thing that makes such a place so special is that we find ourselves in a place of great mystery, or maybe, we find ourselves in presence of something greater than ourselves.

I would go so far that when we are in such a place or time, we are in the presence of **SOMEONE** greater than ourselves.

If you are like me, at times like that I am often at a loss of how to respond.

Do I just be quiet?

Do I give in to my desire to stay there and take it all in – the quiet, the beauty, the wonder of it all?

Do I fall to my knees in realization of the greatness with which I am surrounded?

OR do I act like the people in today’s readings:

Do I cower in fear because I misunderstand (as they do in the reading from the book of the Exodus)?

Do I want to build three booths so that I can stay there or at least mark where this event in my life happened (as Peter in Luke’s gospel this morning)?

Look at what happened in our readings today.

In the Exodus reading, Moses descends from the mountain where he and God have been in conversation. He is carrying the two tablets – the 10 words, the 10 commands that the people who follow Moses into the much Promised Land (promised to our fathers and forefathers that he would save us from our enemies – free to worship without fear – holy and righteous in His sight) – that the people who trail Moses must follow.

And Moses’ face shown with the brightness of God. And the people feared Moses

because he shows the effects of having been in the presence of God.

And we see a similar event again in Luke's Gospel. Jesus is changed when he takes Peter, James and John with him as prays on the mountain.

But look who was there.

Jesus' face changed and begins to shine and suddenly Moses and Elijah were seen speaking to Jesus.

The next thing we see is Peter's "not knowing" what to do, how to respond, how to deal with the majesty and mystery of it all.

"Jesus," I have an idea Peter says; "Let's build three shrines, three booths, three tents, if you will, so we can mark this moment."

It is as if he is saying, "I know this is special, but I don't know what to do!!!"

It is what happens in the presence of the greatness of God, the mystery of God – sometimes it calls for us to be silent – simply to take it all in – simply to be there and to know the awe of being in the presence of God.

It is the same thing as when we see a great piece of art, or Da Vinci's David, or the Pieta, or a beautiful scene, or a rainbow, or the stars of the Milky Way.

We are filled with awe.

Frederick Buechner may say it best when he wrote:

"[Jesus] face shone like the sun," we are told, "and his garments became white as light." Moses and Elijah were talking to him. There was a bright cloud overshadowing him and out of it a voice saying, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." The three disciples who witnessed the scene "fell on their faces, and were filled with awe" (Matthew 17:1-6).

It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they'd tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, and footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the Messiah, the Christ, in his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.

Even with us, something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in, [or just having a beer at a Saturday baseball game in July]. Every once and so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing. *[Originally published in Whistling in the Dark and later in Beyond Words by Fred Buechner]*

Peter and James and John – they finally know of God’s awesome presence and God’s awesome glory.

Peter, James and John are never the same – but being in the presence of God does that to humans.

I once read a novel by Ken Follett called “Pillars of the Earth.” It was about among other things the building of a great English cathedral in medieval era of human history. For me, the context of building a great cathedral of beauty and stature while people suffered hardship, deprivation and starvation belies common sense.

However, the people striving to build this great edifice saw it as an opportunity to reach into the heavens, literally to reach the heavens as a place as physical and real as the earth is real.

It is that same emotion which brought the ancient peoples of the world always to worship on the mountaintops. The mountains were the closest place to the heavens. It was there where the presence of God was sought. And it is there where Peter, James and John have accompanied Jesus.

Sometimes silence is a good enough response from us – to simply stand and be in God’s presence.

That is what we came here to be this morning – in God’s presence – as we take the bread and wine, let us know that we are in God’s presence as God’s presence is in us.

Let us know the awe and wonder of that moment.

It will certainly change us.