In the Gospel lesson that we just read from Matthew, Jesus took three of his closest disciples (Peter, James and John) up to the mountain, not for a hike or anything but to pray. As they were going up, the disciples noticed that Jesus’s face began to glow and his clothes became dazzling white. It looked as if he was turning into some ghostly figure. What was going on here?

As you could imagine, the disciples were terrified by this metamorphic phenomenon. An out-of-body experience and a divine revelation were happening right before their eyes. Then all of a sudden, they heard this voice from heaven proclaiming ***“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”*** This reassuring voice calmed the disciples’ fear and gave them courage to face their uncertain future, even though they may not be 100% sure.

As I mentioned before, right before our passage today, Jesus made a self-disclosure to his disciples about his identity and what his earthly mission was. Peter even publicly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, in the previous chapter.[[1]](#footnote-1) But Jesus kind of told the disciples to keep it “low-key” and not to let everyone know just yet about what they had seen or heard, until after the Son of Man had fulfilled God’s glory and completed his earthly mission.

As you could imagine, these disciples were confused and probably a bit frustrated. In the midst of their fear and confusion, they also noticed there were two other ghostly figures standing beside this “glowing” Jesus. They appeared to be Moses and Elijah. “***Lord, it is good for us to be here!”*** as Peter the impulsive one cried out. Then Peter had this brilliant idea of capturing the moment and commemorating this “feel good” mountaintop experience by building three dwellings (or booths) for each. One for **Moses**, one for **Elijah**, and one **for Jesus**! Peter seemed to be missing the point. He failed to embrace the moment and turned his focus upon worldly importance. Let’s build a few monuments here so others will remember this special occasion. **How often does God not wanting us by speaking or doing in response, but to listen, to obey, and to follow…awaiting for God’s further instruction while embracing in God’s presence and glory?**

This Transfiguration event was a **pivotal moment** that bore great theological significance. It was one of those rare moments where **the human meets the divine.** God revealed God’s glory through the transfiguration of Jesus, as he was ascending to the mountain. The disciples were there as witnesses of all of this, with Jesus, as rightfully so, serving as the mediator (or the bridge) between the human and the Divine.

Chances are, if we were there alongside with those disciples, we would probably have done the same thing as Peter did, by treasuring up and salivating these precious moments. Let’s build a monument there to commemorate this special occasion. What a great idea, don’t you think? We would’ve probably taken a few selfies with Jesus, Moses and Elijah all together and post them on social media. Let’s keep those feel-good moments and put them in a time-capsule and preserve them for as long as we can.

In those days, it was not uncommon to build a shrine or an altar to commemorate a special occasion that took place there. Abraham, Jacob and Moses all did it with building altars and naming mountains to commemorate their special encounters with God, so we can’t really blame Peter for what he wanted to do.

Unfortunately, that was not exactly what God had in mind for us. God does not want us to live on the moment, or to dwell on the past. God wants us to keep on moving forward and to make progress towards our future. Likewise, God does not want us to ride on our “mountaintop” feel-good experiences, but instead, we ought to go down from the mountain and confront with our everyday challenges head-on!

Instead of building a dwelling or a temple up on the mountain, God wanted us to soak in our mountaintop experience and plant temples and monuments of a different kind down below – the ones that we will treasure in our hearts, transform and inspire the lives of others.

For we are God’s spiritual temples called upon to bear fruits of the Spirit.  **We need to experience our own spiritual metamorphosis as well and not to stand on the side and observe!**

The very question that Jesus posed to his disciples prior to this transfiguration event is also being asked of us today. **Do we really know who Jesus is personally? Do we just know “about” him on the outside but not really having this deep relationship on the inside? Are we simply too busy with our lives and totally “miss” Jesus working in the frenzy world that we live? How often do we take time to listen to what God has to say…NOT asking God to make our wishes come true, but to truly authentically allowing God to speak into our hearts.**

As one theologian puts it, ***“when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, he did not change from one thing into another the way the objects in Harry Potter did, or the way a caterpillar does in a cocoon into a butterfly. Rather, it was like a light shined on Jesus that showed who he truly was. No longer could his friends pretend he was just one of the guys, or even an ordinary man with a few extraordinary gifts for healing. Now Peter, James, and John could see that Jesus was closer to God than they had fully realized, and more powerful than anyone they had ever known.”[[2]](#footnote-2)***

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|  | In the Old Testament passage that we read from the book of Exodus, we saw how Moses was also having his mountaintop experience with God. Throughout history, the mountain has served as a refuge and a retreat for reconnecting with God. It is a place where one could **let go** of one’s feelings, emotions, and thoughts, in a form of a retreat from the rest of the world, and **let God** speak to us through personal prayer, active listening and discernment.  Moses ended up spending the next 40 days and 40 nights alone with God up in the mountain. 40 days and 40 nights! That’s a very long time to be alone…but Moses wasn’t alone. God was with him throughout. Moses spent those days intentionally listening to what God had to say and to bring God’s message back to the people. Like Jesus Moses’s face was also glowing reflecting the glory of God. Moses was not the same man as he was before he went up to the mountain. He had seen God and from now on, whatever he does reflects the glory of God. He had the glow of God shining on his face. |  |

Moses reconnected with God through this mountaintop experience. It felt good to be in God’s company and be walking on “Cloud 9”. Like those disciples when they were with Jesus high up on the mountain, it was a warm and fuzzy feeling that no one ever wants to leave. However, the mountaintop experience is NOT where God wants us to be. Our mission field is waiting for us down below where our patience and tolerance towards the people might be tested, just as Moses was.

Like Moses and Jesus’ disciples, God intended us not to build ourselves shrines and temples among ourselves but to go where the people are in order to deliver God’s compassion and message of hope and salvation to others.  **That’s our real mission and calling. Let’s not never forget that.** God does not intend for us to shine among ourselves but to reflect God’s glory upon the lives of others. All glory shall not be directed to what WE have done, what WE have accomplished but instead what God has done through us.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit re-assured us to be with us through each and every step along the way. As we read in our story today, the disciples were frightened by what they saw. They fell on their faces to the ground, perhaps because the glowing upon Jesus was too bright. Jesus came over and touched them and told them **“Get up and do not be afraid”**.[[3]](#footnote-3) He offered the disciples courage and his peace and comfort.[[4]](#footnote-4) The same way he would offer us today when we are discouraged or in fear. When we are being exposed into the light of Christ, our sins and flaws will be exposed as well. We come to realize that we are trivial compared to the greater glory of God…that we don’t deserve to be standing in God’s presence, nevertheless, God embraces us and takes us in. This is what the message of hope and redemption all about, as we’re about to enter the Season of Lent – the holiest season on the Christian calendar.

Over the next 40 days and 40 nights, we are being invited by God to reflect and to examine our own spiritual journey. It is not a time for us to get ourselves all caught up with the busyness of life. But instead we are called to hit the “pause” button, to “slow things down”, to de-clutter and to keep it simple while reflecting upon the goodness and the blessings of our God. **Let us find time to pray and to listen to what God wants to say to us, and not what we want God do for us.** As the Psalmist reminds us, ***“Be still, and know that I am God!”[[5]](#footnote-5)***

The season of Lent challenges us that **it is NEVER about us, but it is ALL about God. It really is a humbling experience when we come to experience God’s peace in our lives. Are we prepared and willing to go where the LORD is calling us? What spiritual mountains will the LORD invite us to climb next?**

As one theologian puts it, *“it is so much easier to stay in our booths than to let God transfigure us into traveling temples! [[6]](#footnote-6)* This is the challenge for all of us today…that we must step out of our booths (our comfort zone and our safe space) and to go on a journey by taking a leap of faith out into the wilderness with the Holy Spirit walking alongside with us. We must stay off the temptations of building earthly shines and temples, like Peter was trying to do…yeah it feels good and it feels right, but it’s NOT going to last. Fix our eyes on what’s important, on what’s above and not what’s here below. Re-tell God’s stories and share our personal eyewitness accounts to those who have yet known Christ or have yet heard of the Good News that Christ brings. Let us walk along with someone who may be struggling through his or her spiritual journey.

As we are standing at the crossroad between the season of Epiphany and Lent, may our lives be not only transfigured, but be transformed and inspired to walk this journey that Christ has walked. We are not alone! Christ will be walking alongside with us. The Holy Spirit will be leading us through each and every step of the way over the next 40 days and 40 nights. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 16:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Abby Thornton Hailey, http://d365.org/devotions/the-mighty-god-devotion-for-february-25-2014/* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 17:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 17:6-7* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Psalm 46:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Brown, Sheri Narrative Lectionary Group Posting 2/21/17* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)