

Last Sunday after Epiphany Year A: 22 / 23 February 2020
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Reverend Kathy Major

“...each of us can remember a moment when we knew we were in sacred space – a moment or a place where we experienced a glimpse of grace, a glimpse of the love and power of God. We...should remember the moments. We need them to sustain us through the difficult times.”

Exodus 24: 12-18
2 Peter 1: 16-21
Matthew 17: 1-9
Psalm 99

What an odd thing to happen to Peter, James and John. They followed Jesus up to the mountaintop and Jesus starts to shine. Peter, James and John catch a glimpse of glory. This is the full epiphany, the fullest revelation of exactly who Jesus was and is. This is Jesus in all of his glory. The three would need the vision of Jesus in all his glory to get them through the next part of their journey with Jesus – his death and resurrection and ascension. A glimpse of glory, an inkling of the love and power of God, gives us hope when the times are difficult.

When was the last time you were surprised by a glimpse of glory? When was the last time you were confronted by the love of God or the power of God?

These are not moments we can create. These moments often come to us when we least expect them.

I lived downstate, in Ossining, NY, for thirty years, and we had neighbors, three doors down from us, who went through an awful time. Mother, Father and only daughter, who was about 18 yrs old at the time of this story. Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer while Dad was battling a cancer for which they'd done all they could do. His doctors weren't clear on how much time he had left as their daughter was to begin her first year of college. It was a difficult time.

A good friend of mine helped rally all of us to bring food and watch out for them. She's not sure that she believes in God, although she goes to church every Sunday and helped lead her church's youth group. She decided that she would organize a prayer circle for the neighbors. She doesn't actually believe in prayer BUT she believes in sending positive thoughts and in the power of positive thinking. She does makes me laugh.

So she invited a bunch of people – some who believe in God, some who don't, some Jewish friends, some Christian – an Episcopal priest besides me – and some friends who are Moonies. She didn't know if anyone would come and she wasn't sure what they would do if they did come to the prayer circle.

What she didn't expect was a glimpse of glory, an inkling of the love of God. Fourteen people came to the prayer circle with food and a guitar and prayers from their traditions, old hymns and 'Cum ba yah.' They prayed and they thought positive thoughts. They shared their hopes and wishes for the family. And they recognized they had entered sacred space – they felt the presence of the Holy. It just all came together, she said. I don't know how it happened. I just know it happened.

Moses went up the mountain to meet with God in our OT reading. This was the first time God called Moses up the mountain for a conversation but it wasn't the last time. Later on in the book of Exodus it says that when Moses went up on the mount and met with God his face would shine when he returned to the people. He had to wear a veil because his face was so bright it bothered them. He would take off the veil to go meet with God and then put it back on after he had explained to the Israelites what God had told him. Moses shone because he had met with God – had a glimpse of the love and power of God, a glimpse of glory.

Peter and James and John went up on the mountain with Jesus and Jesus' face shone with the love and power of God, with the glory of God. Peter tried to respond in the moment, but once

God started to speak they were knocked flat with awe and fear. They had entered sacred space. There was nothing they could do or say – they could only bear witness to the moment. They didn't understand what happened, they just knew it happened.

Peter never forgot that moment. He writes about it in today's Epistle reading from his second letter. He's justifying his authority to those reading the letter – I was an eye witness, he says, of Christ's majesty. "We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain." Peter caught a glimpse of the glory of Jesus and it carried him through the difficult times.

I suspect that each of us can remember a moment when we knew we were in sacred space – a moment or a place where we experienced a glimpse of grace, a glimpse of the love and power of God. We, too, should remember the moments. We need them to sustain us through the difficult times.

We are about to enter the season of Lent – a wandering in the wilderness with Jesus in preparation for the glory of Easter.

But in a sense, this parish entered a season of Lent, a season of wandering when Gary left. What comes next? Who will lead St. James now? You've been here before, not so long ago, wondering and wandering through the wilderness, waiting to enter the Promised Land, waiting for rebirth, new life, Easter morning...

I think Peter, James and John were given the privilege of witnessing the transfiguration so that they would not lose hope on their journey – wandering through those last days with Jesus, witnessing and participating in his betrayal, his trial, his crucifixion and burial. Trying to make sense of his death and then the resurrection of Jesus and how to go on without him after the ascension. Whatever else happened – they had had a glimpse of the love and power of God. Peter never forgot. We never forget those moments.

As we move through this season of wandering – through Lent, through the process of calling a new rector – let those transforming moments of grace carry you through. Remember what your eyes have seen and your ears have heard. God loves you. God will never leave you. God will be with you every step of the way on your journey. It will be all right. As Julian of Norwich said, ‘And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.’ Amen.