

**Those Mountaintop Experiences ~ February 14, 2005**  
**Exodus 34:29-35; I Cor. 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36; Psalm 99**

I know I have mentioned to you before, that, many years ago, when my joints were all in working order, I used to spend a lot of time hiking in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. No technical climbing, just hiking. The first time I experienced the Rockies, I trekked up a frozen waterfall on snowshoes. A journey I will never forget.

In subsequent years, I would hike to Loch Vale, Mill's Lake, Sky Pond, Nymph Lake and other lower altitudes. Then there was the hike up to the top of Flattop Mountain and on to Hallett Peak at approximately 13,000 feet. No other hike ever compared to this one. It was a challenge with many miles of trudging along on switchbacks as altitude was gained. I will never forget the change in flora and fauna as we went higher and higher. Rocky Mountain Sheep and elk gave way to marmots and pikas and hikers quietly sitting along the trail, trying to catch their breath above tree line on the flower dotted tundra. There was a small glacier on the way to Hallett that was covered with pink algae.

It was well worth the struggle to get to the top. I remember looking down at Bear Lake, about one mile below, and having it appear to be a small pond. Most of all, I recall looking up and discovering that there was nothing between me and the heavens. It was as if I could reach out and touch the face of God. The view was incredible. As I gazed up and down and all around, I recalled parts of Edna St. Vincent Millay's beautiful and very long poem, "Renescence."

**It begins with these words:**

All I could see from where I stood  
 Was three long mountains and a wood;  
 I turned and looked another way,  
 And saw three islands in a bay.  
 So with my eyes I traced the line  
 Of the horizon, thin and fine,  
 Straight around till I was come  
 Back to where I'd started from;  
 And all I saw from where I stood  
 Was three long mountains and a wood.

**The poem concludes this way:**

The world stands out on either side  
 No wider than the heart is wide;  
 Above the world is stretched the sky,  
 No higher than the soul is high.  
 The heart can push the sea and land  
 Farther away on either hand;  
 The soul can split the sky in two,  
 And let the face of God shine through.

The face of God shone through both Moses and Jesus during their mountaintop experiences. The Israelites were fearful when they saw Moses' shining countenance. They were afraid he was a god, who should not be looked upon or approached. So he covered his face with a veil to keep them from being distracted and losing their focus on what it was he was trying to tell them. He carried with him an important message from God.

Moses had the second set of tablets containing the Ten Commandments in his arms. He had broken the first set when the Israelites had chosen to break their covenant with God through the creation and worship of the golden calf. He knew they needed the guidance and form the commandments would give them to become successful as a nation, chosen by God, to be God's people

The change in the appearance of Jesus, known as the "transfiguration," celebrated this Sunday, also took place during a close encounter with God. Our story from the gospel of Luke tells us that Peter, John and James were not sure what they were seeing. They were tired and had struggled to stay awake. They believed they saw Jesus in the company of Elijah and Moses. They wanted to take action and do something, suggesting that they construct three dwellings for them. When they took a second look, Jesus was all alone and they heard a voice from heaven saying "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him."

We are not certain if they finally understood just who Jesus was and what his mission was or even if they listened to him more intently after this strange occurrence. Our story tells us that they chose to remain silent about what they had seen.

When we allow what we know of the nature of God to shine in and through us, we, too, are transfigured, we are changed. We can't help but be. Realizing the way we are to live is always a life-changing event, a revelation. Sometimes we need just a little tinkering to become more attuned to God's claim on us. Other times we need some major changes to help us find the way.

With a little reflection on our lives we can discover what steps need to be taken to follow more completely in the footsteps of Jesus. Sometimes, we have a mountaintop experience when we encounter God through reflection and meditation. Our eyes, hearts and souls are opened and we have an "aha moment" or two. We finally understand, through such a happening, what it's all about, we "get it."

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday marking the beginning of the 40 days and nights of Lent. This time on the church calendar commemorates the days and nights Jesus spent in the wilderness determining the direction his life would take. He resisted the way of power and control and chose, instead, a life which revealed the nature of God and which reached out with love to those he encountered.

The same choice is before us. It is never too late to make the decision to move in another direction in life that leads us to become all that God intends for us. It is never too late to wake up to the values in the life of Jesus that can become our values, too. We always have another chance to become better people—more loving, forgiving, joyful and hopeful.

During the 40 days and nights that lie before us, a trek up to our own mountaintops will help us discover that, "The soul can split the sky in two, And let the face of God shine through." Amen