

## *SEEING JESUS IN OUR ORDINARY, EVERYDAY LIVES*

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A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church  
in Brookfield, Connecticut  
on February 19, 2023

Texts: Exodus 24:12-18 & Matthew 17:1-9

### Exodus 24:12-18

The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them." Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

### Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

**O**ver the course of the liturgical year, we make our way through the gospel story, following Jesus from birth to death to resurrection. Right now we're finishing up the season of Epiphany,

which started about six weeks ago. Back then, on the first Sunday after Epiphany, we heard the story of Jesus' baptism, where Jesus is baptized by John, and when he comes up out of the water, he sees and hears

some pretty amazing things. He sees the sky open up and the Spirit of God descend on him like a dove; and he hears a voice from heaven declare, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

That’s what we call a theophany—when someone has a vision of God. And today, on the last Sunday after Epiphany, lo and behold what do we have? We have another theophany. A lot of the details are different. We’re on top of a mountain today, not next to a river. There’s no mention of the Spirit descending; instead, Moses and Elijah appear. And the voice that speaks comes from a cloud, not a hole in the sky. But what that voice says about Jesus is almost exactly the same: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased.”

So this whole season, this whole six-week stretch, is bookended by these theophanies—these moments when the curtain is pulled back, and we catch a glimpse of God’s glory. Just like in the reading from Exodus today. That’s another theophany that also happens to take place on top of a mountain. But there’s one big difference. In Exodus, God’s glory looks like a devouring fire, and no one can get near it except for Moses. In the gospel, it looks like a human being. And not just any human being, but a human being the disciples recognize; someone they know pretty well, in fact; someone they’ve been traveling around with for quite a while.

That’s a very different kind of theophany—a God who’s transcendent and yet within our grasp—within our ability to know and experience; a God who’s set apart, high up in this inaccessible place, and yet right here in front of our faces. The vision doesn’t last very long, though. The disciples get scared and fall on the ground when they hear the voice from the cloud, and when they look up, everything’s back to normal.

The cloud is gone, Moses and Elijah are gone, and it’s just Jesus standing there. Not face-shining-like-the-sun Jesus or clothes-turned-dazzling-white Jesus. Just plain old regular Jesus, tapping them on the shoulder and telling them, “Get up and don’t be afraid.”

So that’s what they do. They they get up, they head back down the mountain, and they carry on like nothing happened. On the way down, Jesus even orders them not to say anything to anyone about what they saw until after he’s been raised from the dead.

I think that must have been really hard for those three disciples, Peter, James, and John—not just having to keep all this a secret, but having this incredible experience, seeing this mind-bending vision, and then going back to the daily grind. It’s like having front row seats at the Oscars, and then getting up the next day and going to back work. Maybe that’s why Peter offers to build three little dwellings up there on the mountaintop—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Because he wants to hang on to that moment. Because he wants to somehow preserve it.

But he never gets the chance, and all the three of them take with them that day is a memory, which probably starts to fade the minute they get back to the other disciples and start thinking about all the boring, routine things people have to think about. *Who’s cooking dinner tonight? Where are we going tomorrow? What time do we have to leave?*

I think we can all relate to that feeling of coming back down to earth. We’ve all had mountaintop moments—moments when we felt like we were standing on holy ground; moments when we felt God’s presence in a particularly powerful way. I think of when my daughters were born. I think of the first time I laid eyes on Yosemite Valley. I think of the

trip I took to Israel years ago Those were all mountaintop moments for me, and they were all hard to come down from. How do you go from holding your newborn daughter in your hands to picking up a gallon of milk at Big Y? How do you go from standing on the edge of Glacier Point to taking out the trash and doing laundry? How do you go from walking around the Sea of Galilee to taking your car to Jiffy Lube?

It's a rough transition.

Maybe that's why we hear about people who claim to see the face of Jesus baked into a potato chip or the image of Mary swirling around in a cappuccino. Maybe they're so hungry for a glimpse of God's glory that they start hallucinating.

Fortunately we don't have to sit around staring into our coffee cups because the gospel today is not only about God's glory being revealed on a mountaintop. It's also about God's glory coming down from a mountaintop and dwelling among us, right here in our ordinary, everyday lives—right here where we spend most of our time doing boring, routine things from the moment we drag ourselves out of bed in the morning to the moment we konk out at night.

And what that means is, every moment of our lives, no matter how mundane, is a chance to catch sight of the divine; an opportunity to see Jesus, not in a Pringle, but in our connections with one another, in the relationships we share—in the ways we support one another, comfort one another, care for one another, provide for one another, forgive one another, and heal one another. In other words, in the ways we are Jesus for one another in a very real and tangible sense—in the ways we enact the love of Jesus, and the compassion of Jesus, and the mercy of Jesus.

We just saw two perfect examples of that this past week, when we came together as a

community to comfort and support the families of Bill Thomas and Helen Martin. If you want a theophany, there you go. You don't have to run home and dump potato chips all over your kitchen counter and make a big mess. God's glory is right here in this place, right in front of our faces. Amen.