

-It was moving day.....the beginning of a hard day. I got up from sleeping on the hard floor in our student apartment at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and started to pack the final boxes into the already stuffed Uhaul truck. I was incredibly sore and slow moving from the all day "load the truck a-thon" that took place the day before. Pam and Fred, Abby's parents who still live in the Bay Area where the seminary is located, came over at 7:15am for a final breakfast before we started off for Missoula, Montana. About 10 friends that we had grown so close to during my time at the seminary came over and we had one final brief "Godspeed" send off prayer service together. After multiple hugs and kisses, we climbed into the Uhaul and slowly began our journey down Delaware Street. Looking in the rearview mirror of the truck, I will never forget the image of our friends and Abby's parents standing outside the apartment complex waving at us until we were far down the street and couldn't see them anymore. Both Abby and I began to sob uncontrollably. This was one of the hardest experiences of our lives, certainly in our marriage. Moving from the student and family community of the Bay Area, CA to Missoula, MT where Abby would start her masters degree and where we knew or had contact with no one except for a random phone number I had acquired of a lutheran campus pastor named John Lund. We drove for days, stopping in Portland OR to visit Hannah, Abby's sister, who was living there at the time. Finally we found ourselves on top of Look-out Pass and winding our way down into the state of Montana. A few hours later, we ran into a rain storm that blew against the truck and slowed us down. However, we finally found our way into the Missoula Valley. We rounded the bend (around Nine Mile) and saw a huge, brilliant, rainbow over Mt. Sentinel. Abby's and my breath was taken away at how beautiful this valley was. At that moment, I felt this intense sense of warmness in my body: like someone or something was wrapping me in the blanket. I felt filled with spirit in a way that was really powerful and profound. It was an encounter with the Divine, I believe, that I kept coming back to: through my days of painting/staining log homes with Jim York, through my interviews with different call committees, through finding a place in Missoula to live, and through getting called to be the pastor at OSLC. That rainbow kept coming back to me.

-The Transfiguration story is a weird story in many ways. Jesus lighting up like a Christmas Tree and hanging out with some OT prophets, how does one relate to that? But at the very base of it, I believe, this is a story of encounter beyond explanation.

- The Gospel of Mark has multiple literary themes it is using to get at the question of "who is this man, Jesus?" One of the big themes it begins to use in chapter 9 is Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Chapter 9 is halfway through the gospel and a big pivot point from Jesus doing public ministry around the countryside of Galilee to being on a journey to a specific destination.

-It's no big secret that this journey to Jerusalem which begins at chapter 9 is very challenging. Most likely, most of Jesus' disciples (being around the age of 15) never had

been to Jerusalem before. They were too far away and too poor to make the journey. Jerusalem was no cake walk: it's where all the Jewish scribes and chief priests were at, the enormous Jewish Temple (perhaps the largest structure in the middle east at the time) towered over all of it, and of course King Herod (the regional Roman governor) and the abusive occupying power of the Roman army were all present in Jerusalem. All the disciples knew, I am sure, that if Jesus kept teaching and talking the way he was in the Galilean countryside, they were going to run into some trouble in Jerusalem.

-Of course, the Roman Empire and Jerusalem weren't the only problems and challenges that the disciples and Jesus would face. They would also have challenges among themselves (For example, right after this story, they come down from the mountain right into a squabble between other disciples and legal experts. Then the disciples are unable to heal a boy which Jesus had to do instead and to which he states, "You faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you?"

-We like to read the Transfiguration story as a literary device: a foreshadowing of the resurrection. Biblical scholars love to debate it's connection to Old Testament prophecy. But at the end of the day, I think this story is much more simple than that.

- I think this is a story of encounter and mystery that helps fuel the disciples for the hard journey ahead. What stories and experiences anchor you and your faith? What stories and experiences do you come back to when the time gets tough?

-Isn't it interesting how usually these experiences of the divine are ones based on awe and wonder, not on scientific certainty. It wasn't the exact positioning of the rainstorm and the light being dispersed into the spectrum of wavelengths through the raindrops to form a rainbow that was so powerful for me coming into Missoula for the first time. It was that moment of certainty that I am not quite certain how to describe. That's what I believe the disciples felt too when seeing Jesus transfigured before them. It is, in a way, the uncertainty of these experiences that propel us forward.

-But here is the thing, some of it falls on us too. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Abby and I could have not been listening..... We could have been banging our heads to loud music. We could have been stressfully bickering with each other as I remember we were tempted to do on that trip many times. We could have largely ignored the outside scenery and been distracted with conversing on smartphones. But we weren't. We were open in a way that allowed this rainbow, the divine to come into our lives and change us.

-Throughout the season of Lent, we will be talking about discipleship and being a disciple of Christ in this time and place. I have invited several members of our church family to share their thoughts on a being a disciple at our Wednesday Lenten Soup Suppers (which begin in two weeks). Call this a shameless plug and invitation for you all to come on Wednesday evenings and support them. Beyond that, I leave with this:

disciples are called to listen. Without listening, the ordinary does not become the extraordinary. Peter, James, and John could have been tired and not gone with Jesus up the mountain. Peter could have been gathering firewood or something (I don't know) and totally missed the entire thing. Instead, their listening made them present for an experience they did not fully understand, but an experience that would carry them through a lot of really challenging times.

-Our world is not short on challenging times right now and we all know that. It seems to me we need more than ever transfiguration experiences: experiences that carry us on our own journeys to Jerusalem. May we have the courage to be listening and to be open to these experiences of God. May they inspire us to continue our work in proclaiming the good news of hope, peace, and love in Jesus Christ. Amen.