

Have you ever had a moment of truth – an experience that truly changed you or the way you looked at things for the rest of your life?

Perhaps you remember about 20 years ago when President Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, learned from a reporter that her parents, whom she'd always known as Christians, were actually Jews who had converted to save themselves and their family from the Holocaust. How such knowledge must have re-arranged what Albright – an Episcopalian in her adult life – knew about her past and how she viewed her own identity.

In today's gospel reading, three disciples were confronted with the identity of Jesus. The Jesus they had known was now revealed to them in a new and incredible way.

In Mark, the passage is sandwiched between some interesting material. It comes after Peter confesses, "You are the Messiah," and Jesus' insistence that he will die and that those who follow him will *also* be required to give up much. Then immediately *following* the trip to the mountaintop, Jesus and the disciples hit the road again on the way to Jerusalem and the cross.

Wedged in between these themes of death comes this magnificent passage of exaltation. In this amazing account, Jesus was physically changed before their eyes – in a way that no one had ever seen. Peter had confessed him as Messiah, but they were unprepared for the visualization of that reality.

There is so much here that echoes themes from ancient Israel. Jesus glowed with the brightness often associated with God's presence in Exodus and elsewhere. There was a *voice* and a *cloud*, also indicators in Exodus of the eternal present with humans. Moses and Elijah were present, symbols of Law and prophecy.

This was a vision for men who would understand that they were witnessing something deeply connected to their spiritual heritage. The Jesus they knew as friend, teacher, rabbi, as somehow uniquely identified with God. Even so, they did not seem to grasp the full magnitude of what they saw.

They knew, though, that it was something big – something far bigger than they had ever before witnessed. Peter, I suppose, felt as though he had to say something. He

offered that the disciples might build three dwellings, like shrines, for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

But before anyone could make an answer, a voice spoke out of a bright cloud: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” These were familiar words, the same words spoken by the heavenly voice at Jesus’ baptism, at the beginning of his ministry. Now as Jesus moved toward Jerusalem, the words were the same. And these words were added: “Listen to him!”

This account in Mark draws us in two seemingly competing directions. First, ***it draws us back to the past***. Like the three disciples stupefied there on the mountain, we see the long history of God and Israel symbolically enacted through voice, brightness, cloud, and prophet. But also, the story also ***draws us toward the future of change***.

This event is called the Transfiguration, because Jesus was transfigured – changed – right in front of the three. But *they* must have been changed, also. It’s impossible to imagine they could have come down the mountain and left that event behind them. They took it with them. In the future, at times when they wondered about their faith – questioned deep down what the whole experience with Jesus had meant or who he was – they could recall this event and what they had seen. As they tried to follow the teachings of Jesus, they could remember the voice from the cloud: “This is my Son...listen to him!”

Sometimes things happen to us or *in* us that change the way we see things, just as Madeleine Albright was changed by the information about her parents.

On a much smaller scale, this is one of the essences of worship, is it not? As I began exploring in my sermon last week, in our praise of, and experience of, God, we find *ourselves* changed. In worship, we remember together the events of the faith and the events of our own lives that have changed us. In communion, we are drawn to recall the self-giving love of God that has brought us this far.

In the post-communion prayer, we are urged to go forth with our changed hearts and translate them into changed lives – to make a difference in the world in which we live. Worship rearranges how we look at our past and how we imagine our future.

In addition to worship, there are other times and places where we see the glory of God. We must, though, keep our eyes open for the glory and our ears attuned to hear the voice. Can you see the glory of God in the beauty of nature – a beautiful sunrise or a

mountain stream? Have you heard the voice of God in the cry of a newborn baby, the laughter of a child, or the banter of teenagers?

It is easier to see the glory and hear the voice at the mountaintop. *But what about when we return from the mountain?*

Jesus and the disciples might well have asked the same question. Why wasn't the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane answered with a change in the coming events? Why was there no glory, no voice at Golgotha? "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" taunted those who passed by. If God could be made known in the glorious mountaintop experience, why not then, when a miracle was needed? Where was God when Jesus breathed his last? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why, indeed?

None of us will ever fully comprehend the darkness of the cross, the depth of the isolation, the pain of the separation. But somehow through the darkness of that experience, we are drawn from light to light – from Transfiguration to Easter.

We need that light when we, too, traverse the darkness. We look for it. In the valley of the shadow of death, in the depth of loss, in the crisis of faith, in the loneliness of depression, in the fear of illness, we wonder about the light. Where are the glory and the voice when we need them most? Sometimes they seem to be missing, even as they were conspicuously absent at the cross.

In Jesus' own experience, we can see that we are drawn through the valley from light to light. Jesus and the three went from the mountaintop of transfiguration to the valley of the cross, where it seemed the light of glory would never be seen again.

As we prepare to journey through Lent, to walk the way of the cross, the austerity of the season reminds us of the stark seasons of our lives. We also have dark periods when the light of glory is nowhere to be seen. Yet the memory of past visions of glory is somehow able to sustain us until Easter morning, when the light of the resurrection dispels the darkness, and the glory of the Lord is finally brought to full expression.