

Getting Close to God
Psalm 51: 1-10 Luke 9: 28-36
Lexington Presbyterian Church
March 3, 2019 Transfiguration Sunday
Rev. Sarah L. Hill

PSALM 51: 1-10

- 1** Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
- 2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3** For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- 4** Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5** Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- 6** You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8** Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9** Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

LUKE 9: 28-36

- 28** Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.
- 29** And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.
- 30** Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.
- 31** They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.
- 32** Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.
- 33** Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.
- 34** While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.
- 35** Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"
- 36** When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

He was a big guy; 6'3" or 6'4" easy. His business was construction, so he had a big build as well. He had two boys which he missed terribly for even the week we were in Gulfport, Mississippi. We had travelled there after Hurricane Katrina joining others from Shenandoah Presbytery to help rebuild from the destruction that was everywhere on the Gulf shores. Actually this was our second trip. This time we were helping to rebuild where an elderly woman who lived in a trailer had been wiped out. It started one evening when we were to eat supper with the woman and her young granddaughter. Grits, fried potatoes, pork chops. Well, this little girl, she was maybe 5 or 6 came

up to this man, in all the glory of her 3' height and called him her "hero." She knew he was rebuilding her Granny's house that had a room that would be all her own. She hugged his knees with all the might she had. She ran into the house for supper full of joy and hope. He on the other hand didn't join us for about 10 minutes. When he talked about this experience before the congregation, as we did after mission trips, he had to leave the pulpit before he totally broke down in tears.

And so it is when you get close to God. You don't know when it might slip up on you, out of the blue, or in a cloud, but you know when it hits you. We don't control it, God does. However we do control how open we are to receiving the closeness of God. Sometimes you have to go up the mountain. Sometimes it happens when we come down off the mountain.

So Peter, James and John, Jesus' closest disciples, went with Jesus up on a mountain to pray. Jesus wanted them to be with him because he probably knew that mountaintops are notorious for being one of those "thin places" where God shows up. Although in the passage before this passage, Peter declares that he knows Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Chosen of God, on this mountain, Peter James and John have an experience that leaves no doubt in their minds.

Dr. Doug Ottati, one of my professors at Union Seminary, used to say, and by the way he was a huge Red Sox fan, "that you can't go to mystery at first base." In other words, you, especially theological students, need to struggle with scripture for a while before declaring an "understanding defeat" and resorting to "it's a mystery" as the explanation. But this passage is shrouded in mystery, not easily accepted amid 21st century technology and information. Questions abound: Why do Elijah and Moses show up? How did Peter, James and John know it was Moses and Elijah? Why were they talking about Jesus' departure? What was making Jesus look so different? How would they be different after God spoke to them?

How would they be different after God spoke to them? Can you think of a time in your life when a God experience changed not just your facial expression but your whole life? For those of you who are parents, experiencing the moment of birth would be one of those times. Huge moments like that it is not too hard to understand how completely you will be changed. But day to day experiences we find harder to attribute to God working intimately in our lives.

We come today to sit before this table. Communion is for us a tangible sign that we are close to God. It reminds us that God through Jesus gave us this meal so that we may remember that Jesus gave his life so that we might live a forgiven life in God's care. Every time we eat at this table, we must remember how close we are to God. And be glad. To God be all the glory. Amen.