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 Transfiguration Sunday

Pay Attention!
Luke 9: 28-36

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus^[f] 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,^[g] 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,^[h] 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;^[i] 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.

In our house, when Ed or Em ask me **where to find something** around the house, I usually say—**it’s right there, just keep looking!**

The other day it was soap.

Ed was sure there was none.

I told him I knew there was—just look for it!

Guess where I found it?

Uh huh, **right in front of him.** Literally.

Sound familiar?

Sometimes **we can’t see things, even when** they are right in front of us.

One pastor this week was writing about the clouds in this story—
 and remembering her time growing up **hearing fog horns—**

You know what’s amazing about fog horns?

They can be the only warning of the arrival of a huge ship—
 a ship you literally can’t see until it is almost to shore.

She asks: **“How could something so large utterly disappear or be so close and absolutely invisible?”**

We've had some serious foggy weather.
 One thing that always amazes me is the people who drive too fast,
 with either no lights, or high beams on!
 How should we drive in fog?
Slowly, carefully, with low lights, right?

When it's foggy, you've got to ***pay attention to everything*** around you.
 The sights, and in the case of ships,
 The sounds too!
 When the way looks cloudy we have to pay close attention!

This story of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain
 with Peter, James, and John, is a story about ***paying attention***—
 especially to all the sights, and sounds around us.

It's also a story about ***finding that what you are looking for
 is actually right in front of you!***
 They were dedicated followers of Jesus.
 Peter had just declared that he knew Jesus was the Messiah.
 But what they saw and heard on that mountain—
 Was a ***NEW*** Jesus. An unexpected one.
 It was God, in all ***glory***, right in front of their eyes!

You can imagine how ***overwhelming*** that might have been.
 Luke mentions that the disciples were ***sleepy*** as they went with Jesus to pray
 (remember the other time that sleep overtook the disciples while Jesus was
 praying?)

Peter knows what they are seeing is so important,
 So he suggests they put up some ***shelters*** for them—
 Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.
 He wants to do what many of us want when we encounter something
 spectacular—***preserve*** it.
 Freeze frame.
 Which is never possible, is it?
 Luke says that Peter didn't know what he was saying!

The ***sights and sounds of the Transfiguration*** are amazing.
 They saw—***Moses***, the giver of the Law,

Elijah, representing the Prophets,
and then **Jesus**, the Messiah.

And you know what they are **talking** about?

Jesus' **mission—his departure—**

³¹ *They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

In other words, they were **continuing a conversation**

that Jesus had started earlier,

when he was telling all of his disciples about his future, and his death.

He says in verse 22:

“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

After that, he says that any who want to be his followers,

must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow him.

Talk about a **difficult conversation!**

But here **Jesus wants to make sure they understand.**

So, when Jesus has these conversations about his death,

We have to wonder—**did they understand him?**

We do, now, after his resurrection, after we've received the whole story,
but what about then?

One thing that's obvious, is that this is **a story about paying attention.**

This is a reminder to us, to carefully, thoughtfully,
pay attention to the sights and sounds around us—

because we never know when we'll see Jesus!

Some say that we don't have these personal encounters or visions today,
but I strongly disagree.

How many of us have seen the glory of God—have you?

What about on a majestic mountain?

In the tides of the ocean?

In the green of a forest?

What about in the smile of a baby?

We DO see God—the glory of God, the majesty of Jesus,
especially if we pay attention!

That's what they saw—the *glory of God*.

That's what Luke wants us to know about the Jesus's appearance:

²⁹ *And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became **dazzling white**.*

It's important because it signifies that Jesus is **HOLY**.

This is more than a man—this is God.

It's also important that **Moses** is there.

We all know Moses led the people out of Egypt, and through the wilderness. He was the one who went up on Mt. Sinai and met with God, and received the ten commandments on stone.

But did you know that when he came down from that encounter, he had been so close to the glory of God, that his *own face was glowing?*

It was actually scary to the people, so many avoided looking at Moses!

They thought that looking directly at God could lead to death.

Kind of like looking directly at the sun can lead to blindness.

It's also important that **Elijah** is there, because he was the ultimate prophet of God, the one who defeated the gods of Baal, the one who relied upon God for his every need.

Remember the jar of flour and jug of oil that didn't run out?

And both Moses and Elijah left their ministries, by *passing their mantle* to the next leader.

After Moses, **Joshua** led the people into the promised land.

After Elijah went to heaven,

Elisha inherited his mantle and his calling to prophecy.

And here is **Jesus**—on this mountain with, you guessed it—his *successors!*

Peter, James, and John, will *carry on his ministry*, right?

Peter, according to Jesus, would be the rock and foundation of the church!

Jesus has taken them to this sacred experience, because he wants them *to know Him, and carry on his ministry!*

They have come to know a lot **ABOUT Him**—

through his teaching, healing, preaching, praying.
 But knowing ABOUT someone is different than **KNOWING someone**, right?
 Jesus wants to be known by his disciples,
 that they might truly **comprehend his power and mission**,
 and carry that out into the world.
 It's **true of us as disciples today**—
 Jesus wants us to **know** Him, so we can **share** Him with the world!

When I was reading this story, and thinking about those disciples,
 I thought about events that **make an imprint upon our hearts and brains**.
 Some sights and sounds do, don't they?

Aren't there some things you've **witnessed, that changed you forever**?
 Maybe it was the **glory of God** in nature, or birth.
 Or maybe it was the **depth of human suffering**
 Some things that we see and hear change us, in unexpected ways.

This is what happens with **PTSD**,
 The brain is changed, so that it gets triggered to 're-live' a traumatic event of
 the past, over and over again.
 To a soldier back in civilian life, it's as if he is still at war.
 Still on edge, hypervigilant, fighting, or trying to stay alive.
 The same is true of survivors of abuse, or natural disasters, or terror attacks,
 or any kind of trauma, really.

Trauma changes us in unexpected ways.
 In order to heal, and be changed in a positive way,
 we have to work through it, talk about it, learn from it.

As a fire chaplain I've been trained to **debrief firefighters**.
 Traumatic events need to be remembered, discussed, and explored—
 so that healing can happen, and people can ultimately find
the lessons and the good in it going forward.
 Without this type of 'debrief', the statistics show high levels of depression,
 addiction and suicide.

There are lots of extraordinary things we see and hear
 That leave a **lasting imprint**,
 whether they be **wonderful, or heartbreaking!**

And ideally we spend time *reflecting* on those experiences,
Sharing them with others,
 Thinking about what we've *learned*, right?
 This is how we *grow, and move forward*.
 This is how we are *changed and transformed* by God.

I think this is one of the *roles of the body of Christ*—
 to be the *safe people, the safe place*,
 where people can '*debrief*' life.

I've seen this bring *healing*, hundreds of times.
 We live the ups and downs and life,
 And when we *look at it together*,
We grow.

Maybe this is why Jesus took *3 disciples* to that mountain.
 Because with three witnesses, they had to *deal with it—together*.

The Bible says they *didn't talk about it until later*.
 Which happens—sometimes we *need time to process*.
 But you *can bet they did talk* about it—
 because we have this story in multiple Gospels!
 In incredible detail!

Think about your life for a moment--
 What have you *seen*—that you just can't *un-see*?
 What have you *heard*—that you can never *un-hear*?

I can still see the *eyes of my first child* at birth, like it was yesterday.
 He seemed to be looking right into my eyes, and my life,
 And of course, it *changed me forever*.

I can still see the faces of all the people,
 who I have seen go *from this life to eternal life*.

But I also have those things I cannot *un-hear*.
 I can still hear the first time Ed said *I love you*.
 And the time my *daughter bravely came out to me*.

I can't un-hear some of the tragedies too.

The ***eery silence*** of a young mom holding the hand of her son, after the doctors had done everything to revive him, and he was gone.

I didn't know hospital rooms could ever be that quiet.

Or the ***heartbreaking screams*** of a grandmother who turned away for just a minute

from her two year old grandson,

as he wandered into their pond and drowned.

Or the ***quiet sobs*** of my family, when we thought we were losing Dad.

What have you witnessed that you can't un-see, or un-hear?

How has it ***changed*** you?

These things that stay with us forever.

They can ***change and transform*** us—

for good, if we allow God to help us work through it.

I think this is the meaning of Isaiah 43,

It says that the Lord walks right with us....

through the ***waters and fires*** of life.

Which is more powerful than just saying God is with you.

Our God is with us through the really hard, strange, life-changing experiences we all encounter.

And God is the one who ***enables us to see things***, sometimes ordinary things, in a totally ***new light***.

From a completely ***new perspective***.

This is what happened with the Transfiguration.

It was ***Jesus, their friend and Lord***.

In a new light, in a new perspective.

When have you seen something ordinary---***in a new light?***

Or from a completely new perspective?

Ever seen a friend or loved one ***doing something that you never knew*** they could do?

Francis Dorff has a story called "*The Rabbi's Gift*".

There was a *famous monastery* which once had been full of monks and visitors, but had fallen on *dry years*.

At last, there was only a handful of elderly monks going about their work, their prayer, and their study with heavy hearts.

The only time their spirits were lifted was when

They heard that the *rabbi was walking in the woods*.

In the woods near the monastery was a small hut that this rabbi had as a retreat house, where he came *to fast and pray*.

And when the monks in the monastery knew he was fasting and praying, they felt *supported by his prayer*.

One day, the abbot of the monastery,

hearing that the rabbi was walking in the woods, decided to *go see him*.

And when he reached the little hut, there was the rabbi standing in the doorway with his *arms outstretched*,

as if he had been standing there to welcome the abbot, who had given no advance notice of his visit.

They greeted one another,

and then went in to the simple hut, to a table with a book of scripture opened.

They sat there, *prayed*, and then the abbot began to weep.

He *poured out his concern* for the monastery and the monks.

Finally, the rabbi said, '*You seek a teaching* from me and I have one for you.

It is a teaching which I will say to you and then I will *never repeat*.

When you share this teaching with the monks,

say it once and then never repeat it.

The teaching is this. Listen carefully.

"The Messiah is among you."

Well, the abbot heard that teaching, he thanked the rabbi, and went back to the monastery.

He said "Listen carefully," I will say this only once.

"The teaching is this: One of us is the Messiah."

It wasn't exactly what the rabbi had said,

but they began to *look at one another in a whole new light*.

Is Brother John the messiah? Or Father James? Am I the messiah?

In the days to come, as they went about their prayer and work and study,
and began to see one another in such a new way!

They showed true love, respect, With a new sense of *expectation*.

And soon the word spread, about the amazing *compassion and expectation*
at this particular monastery!

“Seeing Things in a New Light”, the Rt. Rev. Charles F. Duvall, *Day 1*, 2007.

What if we looked for Jesus—by *paying close attention*
to the people and circumstances of our lives—

whether they be *good times, or bad?*

Wouldn't we *see things* in a new light? A new perspective?

Wouldn't we *see each other* in a new way?

And what if we *relied upon each other*,

To *share* these experiences,

To *talk and pray and learn* together from them?

Wouldn't we be *transformed* too?

That is the *Good News of the Gospel*.

Jesus is all around us—if we pay attention.

He is in the good times, and the bad,

And he is willing to help us *grow, and learn, and find meaning* in all of it.

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.