

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

Where do we ultimately expect to arrive? To what 'place' are we called to aspire? What reality are we invited to inhabit? If you look around yourself today and consider your life and times, what do you see as your surroundings? What lens are you depending on? Which people do you find in your jurisdiction? What worries do you have? What are you afraid of? What is your state of mind? What seems real to you? Do you really understand any of it? Jesus invites [or commands, I guess] Peter, James, and John to walk with him, to start climbing a mountain, and when they do, they find themselves in a strange world of visions unlike anything they have known from reality. Jesus himself seems to be transfigured into a glowing countenance with dazzling white clothing in a way they have never seen him before. And two Biblical heroes from the distant past, Moses and Elijah, are speaking softly but significantly with him. The three disciples really don't understand any of it. They are confused, frightened, and aware of their own awkwardness, as if they don't really belong here. But God apparently thinks otherwise, for they hear the divine voice speak directly to them, explaining the one important truth: this Jesus is my Son. And they are definitely obliged to listen to everything he has to say.

So, is this mountain region to which Jesus has led them an alternative reality? Is it someplace else, someplace foreign, someplace they may visit just this once and then file away as a curious memory? I don't think so. I think the reality Jesus has revealed to these student disciples is, in fact, the true reality, the reality he wants them to put first and foremost in their minds. This reality is not an alternative to the one most familiar to them. It is not a once-off experience of something unusual and bizarre. It is the true reality in which we all live and move and have our being, though it may take the initiative of Jesus to make us aware of it. But what of those other realities with which we struggle each day? Is there somehow a difference between what lies on either side of the veil? No, I think not. The reality of God, God's Kingdom, God's realm, God's great dream, encompasses and embraces all those experiences in which we think we exist, all those things which we mistakenly think are the true realities when they are but resting places along our pilgrimage. The true reality, the one whose view from the mountaintop includes all else, is really our true home, for there is the source, there is the one who makes us, loves us, and keeps us; there where the currency is grace and the state of mind is joy. Not necessarily 'happiness', but the abiding joy of reassurance and spiritual confidence.

No wonder, then, that the three disciples are frightened and confused, for little did they know that such a true reality exists. It's time they learned, thinks Jesus. And it may be high time we learned, too. While we spend our energy, our hopes and dreams, in the confinement of a fleeting time and place, there is indeed an eternal reality which lies beyond our feeble frame and yet includes all that we now know or may choose to know in future circumstances. Have you ever needed to adjust to a new situation, a change because of a death in the family, or a move to a new location, or perhaps contract a life-altering illness? Did things change when you went away to college, or into the military, or began a new marriage, or any other event which plunged you into a new reality? Did you

experience a time of adjustment, perhaps a difficult one? Did you know that God was still with you, that, in fact, you were still in God's true reality all along? Were you able to see it all from the perspective of that mountaintop?

When I moved to Germany at age 17 to be an exchange student, my reality changed overnight. Everything was suddenly different and confusing, and I admit that I became severely anxious. The language, of course, was different, my family and supportive friends were far away, the customs and skills of daily life were unexpectedly altered, and I felt so alone and helpless. This new reality had few of the familiar benefits to which I had become accustomed. But had I been wiser and discerned that I had not left the true reality at all, but just needed to adapt to a new geographical location within the true reality of God's expansive kingdom, I'm sure that the days would have moved easier and that my accomplishments would have been richer. I am trying, despite my natural anxiety, to see my retirement that way. I am so tempted to perceive my daily comfort-zone spent with you as the only reality, when I know that our true reality, shared across all time and space, is, well, God.

From the letters he wrote, we can guess that Paul must have known this true reality, for as he traveled from one location to another, spending time with the groups of people he met and meeting the challenges of culture, language, and custom in such a variety of places, his message remained the same. Living in the true reality, he insists that wherever and whenever and whatever, it is God who has shone in our hearts to give the light of Christ. Whether he was in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome or Galatia, he was yet in the inclusive reality of God, and wanted everyone he came across to experience it as well. He saw all his disputes, his disappointments, his preaching, even his imprisonment, from this mountaintop perspective. We might say that all the Bible heroes and heroines shared this common experience, that the true reality had been revealed to them. And that it was to those who had not yet seen that Jesus came, bearing the timeless light of Christ and the good news of God's real kingdom.

As much as the doctrines of the church and the scholarly efforts of theologians through the centuries have tried, it seems that learning about the mechanics of God's reality cannot take the place of experiencing it ourselves. Perhaps this is why Jesus commands the three disciples that day not to tell anyone about what they have seen and heard at the mountain. It would be better perhaps if each one, when ready, experience the revelation, the removing of the veil, that they may appreciate the surprise and own the vision for themselves. In any case, as the Body of Christ in our generation, we take seriously the task of inviting all into opportunities for experiencing the joy of God's reality. We carry on the mission to spread the good news of forgiveness, charity, justice, and the authority of love. From our vantage point in the realm of God, look upon your circumstances and know that they are but part of a larger wholeness. Look upon the mysteries of existence and know that it is better to live good questions than be deluded by convenient answers. Look upon your companions and know they are also beloved by God and that their company is a gift made possible in this reality by a loving creator. From the heights, look upon the fading past and know that it has been absorbed graciously into the memory of the true and timeless reality we call God. Look upon the future and know that this reality, being after all the kingdom of the Almighty God, is ripe with infinite possibilities for all those who choose to do the faithful thing. Amen