

Last Sunday of Epiphany

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Moses is called by God to press into a mysterious cloud for 40 days and nights. A number of times in the Book of Exodus, Moses is called out to talk with God on a high mountain, before he is sent to the people below with detailed instructions for their next steps in ministry.

On one such encounter, Moses is almost back to camp, when God's voice addresses the people, *delivering unto them...* the ten commandments.

The Ten Commandments are articulated in two places in the Torah, both in Exodus and in Deuteronomy—the second and fifth books of the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. While we *all know* these divine decrees, in the instance that we might have among us a visitor from, say *another tradition*, these commandments have been neatly formatted for your viewing pleasure and memorizing convenience on page form on page 350 of the Book of Common Prayer. (*Its the red one.*)

The Ten commandments. In the wilderness, the voice of God.
After what was likely a very long pause, Moses turned his face to the people...and Moses, Senior Warden of the nation of Israel, proceeded to facilitate the first...annual meeting.

Having heard the call of God from on high, they set about the task of determining the community's new course, in light of this stunning revelation. Luckily, they had already been "lightly fortified" with Manna, from heaven.

One by one they examine God's 10 directives and attempt to discern and quantify their practical implications in *their* lives.

*OK, honor father and mother...thoughts? Yes, you in the brown tunic.
Anyone who **strikes** his father or mother should be put to death!
Anyone who **curse**s his father or mother, should be put to death!
Alright. Cursing and striking, are we agreed? All in favor.
Those opposed? Good.*

One by one they hashed out the gritty details of those 10 directives, chapter headings for Israel's call.

If you find your enemy's Ox...you must return it. Alright, Alright, no stealing.

And so the word of God, became fleshed out.

Four centuries later-(ish) Elijah, prophet of God, is likewise called to a high mountain for 40 days and nights. God "walks by" in the form of a voice and the prophet is terrified. God reassures him and sends him out with words for the people and detailed instructions.

The primary theme of practically all prophetic writing in the Hebrew Bible is the call to repent and to return to the God of the Covenant—that bond which was articulated in the promises given to Abraham and Sara, and finally sealed with Noah’s rainbow. Elijah is representative of the Prophetic voice in Ancient Israel.

At times the legitimacy of prophets was bolstered or established by predictions and their consequent fulfillment, but primarily the prophetic role was to speak the heart of God into the world as is. To call beloved Israel, back into God’s arms. Prophets spoke to the present as it affected the future. Stop. Turn around. Come home.

Today’s passage from the Gospel of Matthew depicts an event known as the transfiguration. The word transfiguration is derived from the Greek *metamorphe* from which we get the English word “metamorphosis,” --a marked change in appearance, character or function. A transformation.

In Matthew’s account, Jesus takes his “inner circle” (James, Peter and John) up yet another high cloud filled mountain. Jesus is transformed before their eyes, his garments becoming a dazzling white, his face shining like the sun.

Suddenly the disciples see, with Jesus— Moses and Elijah.

Moses represents the Jewish Law to these disciples, **but** he also represents the people’s rescue from slavery in Egypt— Moses, leading them to the promised land. In this context, Moses represented the people’s story. “Where we were, where we went, and how we got there.” He was the embodiment of their journey with God, the story of God with them.

Elijah on the other hand, represented all of the voices from the prophetic tradition that called for fidelity and return to the Covenant. His presence might have stirred a more emotional connection, calling forth images of both **God’s devotion** and their persistent **desertion** of the Covenant.

Moses and Elijah. The law, the prophets, and the story.

When the three are seen together on the mountain, Peter...is so excited. He can’t believe his eyes and his heart leaps. In pure, unaffected joy, he blurts out “It is good for us to be here!”

And then, in his inimitable and perpetually misguided way, Peter, insists that he should make 3 dwellings so they can be comfortable. Before Peter even finishes making his suggestion, a bright cloud appears. And a voice speaks. “This is my Son the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him.*” In response to the voice, the disciples fall to the ground in fear. And Jesus comforts them.

Perhaps you are politely wondering what all of these forty day mountain trips could have to do with us, me and you, counting the minutes until the fortified coffee hour, followed by the Annual meeting, during which we will be *counting the minutes?*

Moses and Elijah represented the Law, the Prophets, and the story. They called to mind for the disciples, the past, present and future relationship between God and Israel. It was in the presence of these icons of law, history and prophesy that *Jesus was transfigured*. Smack in the middle of what was, what is, and what is to come.... he became **something spectacular and new**....All of it filled him and he filled all of it, and his face shone like the sun.

This is us. It is precisely where we stand, together, every Sunday in the Eucharist. We stand in this, the whole of our Salvation story—

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son

We await God's kingdom come. We offer ourselves, our souls to the purposes of God in our world and in our midst.

*We remember his death,
We proclaim his resurrection,
We await his coming in glory;*

We stand on a mountain as we speak, extending our hands to hold the whole of salvation history and the whole of God's call on our lives, as individuals and as a community— God's love manifest by us, with us, and in us.

And so today, we will sit together and review. What did God do here at Saint Ann's this year? Were we at cross purposes? Did we do the work? Were we true to the vision? Did we *listen to him*?"

And what now? Where is the Spirit leading us next? How can we make room for the future to which we have been called? Are there ways that we will need to change to be available to our call? What training will we need to be useable in the outworking of God's marvelous purposes here? Should we be reallocating resources? Money, bodies, time, work spaces, buildings.

Come on folks, this meeting, this is where we have the opportunity to "flesh out" the prophetic vision that we have discerned from God. Do we remember that call? Has it changed? And what will our faithfulness look like one year from now?

For every one of today's mountaineers, the response to divine presence included some measure of fear and trembling. As we behold the glimpses of God's glory among us are we frightened? Is our fear of the loss of what is and always was, overpowering our drive toward an uncertain future in God? God has promised not to leave us comfortless. Still, at the end of the day, this day, we as a faith community have choices to make. Will we turn back, clinging to the old familiar? Or will we, with Peter, joyfully proclaim "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"