

**Sense of the Sacred, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E7090222**  
**2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and Mark 9:2-9**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 22 February, 2009**

It must have been difficult for Peter, James and John to keep quiet about what they had seen up there on the mountaintop that day. They had an experience that many of us would love to have. They had been invited by Jesus to go up to the top of the mountain. There, they saw him glorified right in front of them. His clothes became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared with him. On their way back down the mountain, though, Jesus told the three to keep quiet about the event. “He ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”<sup>1</sup>

There is the invitation and journey up the mountain. There is the experience on the mountain, and there is the journey back down the mountain.

We desire a close contact with God. We long for a sense of the sacred. We want God to speak to us in our lives: to help us make decisions; to reassure us when times get tough; and to tell us that everything will be all right. Jesus invites us to go up the mountain with him. You are invited to experience Jesus in his glory, but, it can be a difficult climb.

I got to go up to the top of Mount Tabor where the transfiguration allegedly took place. I did not climb it on foot, however. I rode in one of the many cars provided by a car service. The only thing difficult about my trip up that mount of Transfiguration was squirming in my seat as our driver narrowly missed the drivers of the other cars careening around the sharp curves of the road on the mountain.

While on Mt. Tabor, I didn't experience any glorious time with Jesus. Nothing happened, except to see a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside and to see the beauty of the Church of the Transfiguration that was built there to commemorate the event. I didn't experience a glorious time with Jesus because the journey up the mountain was too easy and we had a schedule to keep.

The journey Jesus invites us to take with him is a difficult struggle. There are no shortcuts and no free rides. Those who have experienced pain and heartache in their lives, such as the death of a close loved one, know what it is like to struggle up the mountain to experience God.

The occasion in my life when I came face to face with God was when I was at my spiritual low point. I was without a church pulpit. I had no idea what lay ahead for me. I didn't know if I had the ability to do ministry any more, but I took time out to experience an Academy of Spiritual Formation. I engaged in an intense week of reading, listening, studying, meditation, and writing. There, I heard the voice of God calling to me to journey onward and to use the gifts of ministry that God had given me.

Ironically, the low points of our lives are opportunities to experience high points of faith and transfiguration. They give us a sense of the sacred. Listen for Jesus' voice inviting you to go up the mountain with him for transfiguration. Remember that the journey up the mountain can be long, tiring, and painful.

While they were up on the mountain of Transfiguration, James, Peter, and John witnessed Jesus' clothes turning white. Matthew and Luke, in describing the transfiguration, said that Jesus' face also changed and shone brightly. Mark, the oldest gospel, does not include that detail. Jesus' clothes turned a brighter white than any laundry detergent or bleach could get them. Something special was happening before the disciples' eyes. Jesus was being glorified in the presence of Moses and Elijah, who represented the Law and the Prophets.

Peter had a bright idea. He said, “Let us make three dwellings for them.” “Let's freeze this moment of glory. Let's cling to the past.” We want to do that. We want to freeze time. We are nostalgic for the good old days, especially as the cloud of economic uncertainty overshadows us and grips our nation, and the whole world.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 9:9

When I was a senior in high school, our next door neighbor let me drive her 1960 Pontiac convertible to take my date to the senior prom. It was a beautiful, sweet, blue car. They won't make Pontiacs any more. Through a member of the team that developed the Saturn, I was able to purchase a 1992 Saturn SL2. What a great car that was. It had all the features of the Japanese imports of the day. Saturn had a policy of no-haggle pricing, and the Saturn workers shared in corporate decision-making. Due to bankruptcy, General Motors will rid itself of the Saturn nameplate. We cannot freeze time, no matter how nostalgic we are.

Mark says that while they were on the mountaintop, "...a cloud overshadowed them." A cloud has overshadowed us with financial woes. Things will not continue as they have been. Mutual funds are worth one half the value they had a year ago. Bank of America stock has dropped since January 1, 2008 from \$44.15 a share to \$3.79 a share. Many of us feel doomed by the cloud that overshadows us.

The cloud over Jesus and the three disciples on that mountaintop carried the voice of God. Perhaps the cloud that has come over us is the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"<sup>2</sup>

If we listen to the voice of Jesus, we will be transfigured and begin doing things in a new way. If we listen to the voice of Jesus, we will form a worldwide economic system that does not favor the rich, the powerful, or the bankers. We will form something new where all people have value and opportunity and where no one is able to take advantage of the poor and dispossessed.

"Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus."<sup>3</sup> After the high mountain moment, after the sense of the sacred, we have the journey back down. We have to live our lives in the real world. We cannot build shelters for Jesus on the mountain or freeze him in tradition. We cannot stop time no matter how many scriptures we can find to quote. "We can only follow Jesus from one place to another, serving as best we can, remembering to love those entrusted to our care."<sup>4</sup> We trust God to have a future, even as the future we thought we had planned slips away.

Jesus ordered the disciples to tell no one what they had seen until after the resurrection. Probably, no one would believe them anyway. It was a preposterous story, but, it put an exclamation point on what Jesus had told the disciples six days before. We like glory, and that certainly is what the three disciples saw on the mountain top. This incident happened six days after Jesus told them he would go to Jerusalem and be crucified. Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."<sup>5</sup> For the sake of Jesus, we give up our lives so that others may have more abundant lives.

This mountaintop experience of glory marked the turning point from the glory days of Galilee to the trials of Jerusalem. From this point, Jesus journeys to the city where he would face the powers of political and religious leadership. In Jerusalem, Jesus would be crucified. On this day, we turn from Epiphany to Lent and our journey moves to Good Friday and Easter. The journey is onward, not backward to the good old days.

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<sup>2</sup>Mark 9:7

<sup>3</sup>Mark 9:8

<sup>4</sup>Tom Ehrich, "On a Journey" February 20, 2009

<sup>5</sup>Mark 8:34-35