

Pray: Search me, O God, know my heart, test me and know my anxious thought. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Driving home with the family one winter night up in Haliburton, one of our kids said, “Hey! Is that the Northern Lights?!” Everyone leaned to that side of the van to get a better look. There they were, shimmering green Aurora Borealis, swirling, elusive columns of light in the night sky, a natural, phenomenon of solar energy exciting electrons in the atmosphere, the first time seeing something marvelous that ignites wonder in a child’s mind.

Take any natural phenomenon and move it up a notch on the scale of fact and experience. The story of Jesus’ ‘transfiguration’ describes what seems to have been an actual event, but an event in which the deepest significance of everyday reality suddenly and overwhelmingly confronted Peter, James and John.

It would be easy enough to dismiss such an experience as a hallucination, although an odd one. Jewish scriptures and traditions tell of various events like this, when the veil of ordinariness that normally prevents us from seeing the ‘inside’ of a situation is pulled back and a fuller reality is disclosed. Most of us don’t have experiences like this (nor did most early Christians, so far as we can tell); but unless we allow skeptics to bully us, we should be free to affirm that this sort of thing has indeed happened to some people (usually quite unexpectedly), and that such people usually regard it as hugely important and life-changing. The transfiguration of Jesus might *not* be the main reason we believe but it goes some distance to reinforce our faith. Apologetics, conversations that count, about the reasons for our faith, convey truth, as we shall see

The three watchers, Peter, James and John, burly, experienced fishermen, completely comfortable with a dark sky and storms at sea, are terrified. Peter blurts out, as per normal, the first thing that comes to his brain, trying vaguely not only to prolong the moment but to hook it to one of the Jewish Festivals. *Hey, let’s erect three tents; one for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Ya, that’s a good idea. Confusion. 911.* The sheer oddity of his bumbling suggestion is itself strong evidence of the story’s basic truth. Nobody inventing a tale like this would make up such a comic moment, rendering a lighter tone to a holy encounter.

But what are we to say? Can we look at the whole thing not just from a human point of view, but from God's point of view? "With caution and humility," writes Bishop Tom Wright, "we might try."

Up to this point, through extraordinary actions and puzzling but profound words, Jesus has unveiled for them what God is up to. Those 'outside' look and look, but never see; the disciples are having their eyes opened, so that they can see for the first time, the inner reality of God's kingdom, and the central truth – even though neither the kingdom, nor he look like what they expected – Jesus really is the Messiah.

Jesus ascends a mountain to pray, taking along his closest friends and disciples— Peter – little Rock Jesus named him, James, and John whom Jesus named Sons of Thunder, wise choices of new names for future witnesses to such a sight, because all three would, in their own way and at the right time, be true to their new names, in proclaiming what they saw that day.

Western culture is increasingly realizing, what most other cultures have never forgotten, that the world we live in, has many layers, many dimensions, and that sometimes these dimensions, normally hidden, may appear. Then, like a child who sees a natural phenomenon in the night sky and gasps with wonder, ever after looks at things differently.

That's how it was on this mountain, that many biblical historians agree was the 6400 ft high, snow-covered Mount Hermon, just north of Caesarea Philippi. What was the inner reality of Jesus' work? He was continuing, and completing tasks of the great prophet Elijah and behind him, of the greatest prophet of old, Moses himself. Both of them had disappeared from view rather than died in the ordinary way, surrounded by family and friends (as we used to do before the Covid19 pandemic). Now they appear with the ordinariness drawn back for a moment, and Jesus is with Moses and Elijah, shining with a brilliant light. But instead of a disappointment one might feel on seeing how a magic trick is performed or that it's just the traveling salesman from Kansas behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz, instead of disappointment, there is a profound awe, a delicious terror. Moses. Elijah. Jesus. Talking. together. We'd be confused and fearful too.

People are sometimes fuzzy what this means. Surely this is a sign that Jesus is not indulging in fantasies about God's kingdom but that he is speaking and doing truth, the sign of a true prophet, the true Messiah.

The heavenly voice confirms it. "This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him." Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour. The admonition to Peter in particular but also James and John, and to us, is this; Listen to him.

On a family trip to Jamaica in Feb 2017, our host was Desley White. Desley had been coming to Canada for years as a migrant farm worker employed by an apple farm in Bowmanville. Desley was an answer to prayer. As we began reaching out to the migrant farm workers, we realized their spiritual needs were as important as providing bicycles, hats and sunscreen; they wanted to come to Church. As a spirit-filled pianist and singer in his home church in Jamaica, Desley was thrilled to be asked to help lead worship for the migrant workers when they could time off Sunday evenings at St John's Bowmanville.

As the Lord allowed, when we flew to Kingston Jamaica four years ago, Desley and his wife Sharon, the owner of her own travel agency in Jamaica, were our hosts and invited us to their church near Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

(post the link of he and Pastor Alvin playing).

So, there we were listening to Desley in his own church, accompanying the worship band at the Aracabessa Church of God. Time came for announcements and if anyone in the congregation felt there was a word from the Lord, to share it. As visitors from Canada, I wanted to say a few words on behalf of my family visiting Jamaica for the first time, about how pleased we were to be invited to Desley's church. I shared that as a Pastor, I had prayed for a musician to help lead the workers in worship in Canada and then we met Desley, a man of God, a gifted musician, playing the keyboard, after long days working in the fields. That morning of our trip as I had been reading through the OT, I was in 2 Kings and remembered that prayer two years before, asking, as Elisha the prophet says, "Bring me a harpist." That's what God did; God brought us Desley White! Not a harpist, but an instrument of the Lord!

And what was the guest speaker's chosen Bible verse that night? 2 Kings 2 and 3, the same story of Elijah and Elisha! I was stunned. He hadn't been in the room when I

had shared my story; it was affirmation of how close heaven is, God-incidents, when we listen to Jesus.

The line between heaven and earth, life and death is very thin. Sometimes we get a glimpse, the veil is pulled back; a change of point of view can shift our whole worldview. From basically forgetting God is available every hour of every day, to wow, THIS is God!

Philip Yancey, author of *Disappointed with God*, *The Bible Jesus Read*, and *What's so Amazing about Grace?*, among many other works, was driving home from a speaking engagement along a back mountain road in Colorado, when his truck hit black ice and began to swerve. The tires caught on gravel and the truck flipped five times, landing on its wheels, the roof of the cabin caved in. Yancey was able to crawl out, bleeding, dazed but not dead. His neck hurt like heck. Just then a vehicle with a couple pulled over and sprung immediately into action; they were two off-duty emergency medical team workers. Yancey was driven, his neck held stiffly in place, then airlifted to a Denver hospital. He lay in a head brace not able to move for seven hours awaiting cat scan results. He'd broken his neck, vertebra C3, and was mere millimeters from having severed his spinal cord, which would have either killed him or rendered him a quadriplegic. Yancey would go on to recover. In that moment, an experience where he had drawn closest as he had ever been to death, he wrote of the effect it had on him.

“I am trying to keep before me the crystalline vision I had while lying strapped down for seven hours. I have learned how thin is the thread that separates life from non-life, and how comforting is the knowledge that I am not alone on this journey. I have learned these things in a way that I doubt I will ever forget.”

All this talk of the closeness of heaven, of Jesus' transfiguration could remain puzzling to us. We don't generally experience things as dramatic as this story. We don't often try to interpret the details of our lives and our times according to a detailed scriptural plot or face down bullies and skeptics by reciting miraculous encounters. But each of us is called to do what the heavenly voice said: Listen to Jesus, because he is God's beloved son, the unique Christ. As we learn to listen, even if we sometimes get scared or confused and say the wrong things, we may find that glory creeps up on us unawares, strengthening us, as it did the disciples, for the road ahead.

An energy surge. A holy moment. A scripture story or word shared that points to him who is the truth. Aurora Christos.

Indescribable.