

“In a Flash” **Mark 9:2-9**

St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Transfiguration Sunday (February 15,) 2015

**2** And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, **3** and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. **4** And there appeared to them Eli'jah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. **5** And Peter said to Jesus, “Master,[a] it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah.” **6** For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. **7** And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son;[b] listen to him.” **8** And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. **9** And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.

It was one of the days ...” after six days” — or in other translations “six days later” — ... I’ve not ever been absolutely clear “after what.” It was just one of those days, six days after another one of those days, when — *voila* — something really big happened. It was a big deal! So much so, we celebrate every single year — the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday — the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent.

How many of you know what you were doing on each of these days, or if you weren’t present then, do you realize the importance of those moments:

- **May 24, 1738** (The day John Wesley’s heart was strangely warmed.)
- **April 14, 1865** (Assassination of Abraham Lincoln)
- **December 7, 1941** (Attack on Pearl Harbor)
- **December 1, 1955** (The day Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus and was arrested.)
- **November 22, 1963** (Assassination of John F. Kennedy)
- **April 4, 1968** (Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.)
- **June 6, 1968** (Assassination of Robert Francis Kennedy)
- **November 22, 1968** (My first date with Jane)
- **September 11, 2001** (The attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon by terrorists)

On most all of those days, most of the people alive at that time had no idea just what would happen on that day and how much it would impact their lives, and the lives of many others.

I often note (to myself if not aloud) each time I go to an emergency room how almost all of the people in there (not on the hospital payroll) had no idea that this would be where they would spend their day, or — perhaps — their last day.

Life comes at us — notwithstanding all of our planning — in strange and unexpected ways, with dramatic things unanticipated AND so often never being realized just how big they would be, even when they happened. It takes the perspective of the historian to understand the meaning of the event, or the day.

No one, but God, could have possibly seen what chain of events would begin on **December 1, 1955**, when **Rosa Parks told bus driver James F. Blake** that she would not get up and yield her seat on the bus to a white man who boarded.

As bad as the attack was on **September 11, 2001**, I doubt if any of us could foretell **how much life** for all of us, in America and abroad, would and could **never, ever be the same again**.

As much as I was looking forward to that after the high school cast party would be on the night of **November 22, 1968**, there was no way I could imagine just how much my life would be forever altered after my first date with that cute little blonde girl.

*SIX DAYS LATER* ... Peter, James, and John had no idea of how that day was going to turn out when Jesus motioned for them to come with him for a little climbing excursion.

But **then it came to them in a FLASH!** Although many, or most, commentators refer to the TRANSFIGURATION of Jesus — his garments and

skin tone began to shimmer and glow in a bright white light; Moses and Elijah showed up to add to the drama ... although many Bible scholars refer to the TRANSFIGURATION of Jesus, I am impressed and moved by those scholars who refer to the **TRANSFIGURATION of Peter, James, and John**.

They had this FLASH of RECOGNITION — this MAN that they had been following, had been listening to, had been learning from, had been trying to understand — this MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD!

And in a twinkling, a descending of clouds, a sound that seemed like a voice from heaven — **THEN** Moses and Elijah were gone; the clothing and skin tone were back to “normal” (whatever “normal” meant when you were hanging around with Jesus.)

Then it was gone. All over. What did it mean?

They wouldn't actually fully understand the implications until after the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coming of the Holy Spirit. But between that moment on the mountain and the crucifixion, they had to sort it out, mull it over, chew on it, roll it round and round in their minds and hearts.

It had come in a FLASH. **Peter wanted to memorialize it** with a tabernacle, or booth, or monument (depending on your translation) — something that they could hold onto.

But in those GOD-FLASH moments, **monuments usually become idolatrous. The real power in the GOD-FLASH does not hang around. Monuments become more sacred than that which they attempt to memorialize — that's the idolatry.**

- **Mary and the angel Gabriel.**
- **Joseph and the angel Gabriel.**
- **The Shepherds with a chorus of the heavenly host.**
- **Mary, Mary, and Salome with the young man in the white robe at the empty tomb.**

- **John Wesley on Aldersgate Street, when his heart was strangely warmed.**

It wasn't just those people of long ago.

In **Annie Dillard's Pulitzer winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek***, she wrote that often God comes in through glimpses, through our peripheral vision, not in direct staring at. This is how we catch flashes and snippets of God.

***Indeed the television news reporter who did the story on Saint Marks' Homeless Jesus Blanket ministry, this is how it happened for her. Day after day, since November she has driven by, and perhaps even looked directly at the Homeless Jesus statue. But it was on that Monday when she caught a glimpse of Homeless Jesus out of the peripheral vision, that she drove around the block to come back and explore. It's the peripheral/side vision that is not perhaps so clear, but is often so invigorating.***

In my newly discovered, to me but not to the rest of America, poet Mary Oliver, we hear of such moments of **sudden flashes of clarity** that come in the **midst of the mundane**:

**I go down to the shore in the morning  
and depending on the hour the waves  
are rolling in or moving out,  
and I say, oh, I am miserable,  
what shall—  
what should I do? And the sea says  
in its lovely voice:  
Excuse me, I have work to do.<sup>1</sup>**

God comes to us like that — in FLASHES.

**Characteristics of GOD FLASHES are these:**

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver, Mary (2012-10-11). *A Thousand Mornings: Poems* (p. 2). Penguin Group US. Kindle Edition.

1. They come suddenly and then they go. Unexpected are they and short in duration.
2. They capture our attention, if we paid attention to begin with. They do not leave us neutral, but leave us emotionally impacted.
3. They leave a residue — in us, if not on the surface of the physicality of the place. I don't know if there were any Moses or Elijah DNA left behind, on that mountain. But a residue of holiness was sticking to the consciousness of Peter, James and John.
4. They require us to process the meaning. It is not explanatory. It is much more MYSTERY. But because of its residue, we are unlikely to simply brush it off as indigestion. It gets inside us and gets ahold of us, and we wrestle with just what it means. In the words of the Gospel, **Mary pondered these things in her heart.**

I suspect that there are some people who don't too often have to wrestle or dance with the GOD FLASHES because they simply miss them. They are too busy -

- with work
- with their own worries
- with their own agendas
- with their own preconceived notions of how things must be

**How often** have you missed a GOD FLASH sent your way?

**“How can I tell, how can I count, if I missed it?”** you might be thinking. Well, I can't give you a number certain, but I can give you a way to begin counting:

- How many days **has it been since you noticed God sending you a message?**
- How many days **has it been since you felt an experience that you didn't just observe, but was something that you BEHELD.**

- How many days has it been since you encountered something that left a residue on you, that you had to chew on, after it was over.

How many days? That's the minimum number of GOD FLASHES that you have missed.

God is every single day, by God's good grace, offering each of us gifts, if we but receive them — gifts in FLASHES

- that can transfigure the monotony,
- that can transfigure the shallowness,
- that can evaporate the insipidness.

And, WHAT'S MORE — Every single person you and I encounter every single day brings to us a gift, if we will but receive it.

## **PAY ATTENTION.**

**This morning  
the beautiful white heron  
was floating along above the water**

**and then into the sky of this  
the one world  
we all belong to**

**where everything  
sooner or later  
is a part of everything else**

**which thought made me feel  
for a little while  
quite beautiful myself. (Mary Oliver)<sup>2</sup>**

This Wednesday — Ash Wednesday — we begin the season of Lent. It's a season often called a LABORATORY where we can try out things for

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<sup>2</sup> Oliver, Mary (2012-10-11). "POEM OF THE ONE WORLD " *A Thousand Mornings: Poems* (p. 16). Penguin Group US. Kindle Edition.

just a season to see how they can change our lives — or not. It's just an experiment.

I urge each of us to consider claiming this LENT as a season to practice being TRANSFIGURED by looking for, and by paying attention to, the GOD FLASHES that come in the glimpses, in the peripheral vision, of every single day of our lives.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?**