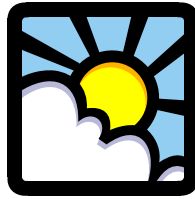


## WHEN GOD VISITS US



*Scripture:*

**Exodus 24**

12. The LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’
13. So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.
14. To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’
15. Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.
16. The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud.
17. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.
18. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

**Matthew 17**

1. Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.
2. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.
3. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.
4. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’
5. While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’
6. When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.
7. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’
8. And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.



### WHEN GOD VISITS US

Now that’s a strange story, a very strange story. This is Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, and this is the story that we read on that Sunday, celebrating the Transfiguration of Jesus.

An old hymn begins with this sentence: “God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.” That hymn could have been written by those three disciples who experienced the Transfiguration of Jesus. For that was certainly a mysterious event and very difficult for preachers to interpret.

Jesus took the three, Peter, James and John up on a mountain. We are not told why they were going up the mountain. But we are told that Jesus was transfigured there. Jesus face shone like the sun. His garments became white as light, and two great figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, appeared. A strange mysterious happening took place on that mountain. But was it so strange?

### **A WONDERFUL AND FRIGHTENING MOMENT**

There are events that happen in our lives when transfigurations also take place. Tom Long, that great preacher of our day, describes a day when his daughter was a little girl. He says, “She was dancing playfully in our living room. I was on the couch trying to read the newspaper, but her whirling motion captured my attention. I watched her spin, her arms spread wide and her hair tossing as she twirled across the room. Suddenly the way her mouth was fixed, the manner in which her hair fell across her cheeks, and the play of sunlight through the curtain on her face created an unusual effect.

“For one instant she looked not five years old, but twenty-five. There was a single fixed-frame in her motion in which I saw her, not as a child, but as the grown up woman she would become.

“Then she turned, the light changed, her face broke into a grin and she was a child again. But I had seen what I had seen, and there was no escaping it. It was a wonderful moment, and a frightening one as well. Wonderful because I had seen my daughter as a mature woman. Frightening because I anticipated what it would take to live toward that day. She would not be a child forever, and I must be willing to relinquish that.” (1)

### **A CONVERSION EXPERIENCE**

Robert Tuttle tells about a conversion experience that his son had.

Tuttle says, “In conversion, the light from the world of God breaks in upon our narrow personal world and fills it with light.

My son, a college senior, walked the streets of Durham, North Carolina all alone in a deep spiritual struggle. Like old Jacob, he wouldn't give up wrestling with God. And then out of the darkness and loneliness, there came a light and a fellowship for him, a new dimension of life that has never left him.

“When he came home for the Thanksgiving holidays, he stood in the middle of the floor and without taking off his overcoat, he told me all about it. And he asked, with a glow on his face, ‘Dad, did you know that could happen to someone?’”

Tuttle comments, “The world of God's light had broken in upon him. He had been converted. He had become a child of God, a child of Light.” (2)

His son experienced a transfiguration.

### **GOD'S GRACE**

I remember a time in my own life when I was struggling with a number of decisions about my future. I was questioning whether or not to continue in the ministry. And I shared my anxieties with a minister friend one day. Carefully, thoughtfully, he shared his insights and wisdom about my future.

Suddenly, for a moment, as we talked, it seemed as if he had changed. I felt as though God were speaking through him to me. He became a channel of God's grace to me. And then it was over. He was himself again. But I had heard what I had heard.

### **A WORD FROM GOD**

The disciples, too, heard a word from God on that mountain.

**THEY HEARD GOD SAY,  
“JESUS IS MY BELOVED SON,  
WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.  
LISTEN TO HIM.”**

From that moment on, Jesus was no longer just a great teacher or a wonderful leader. Jesus became their Lord.

After Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples could no longer relate to Jesus in quite the same way they had before. They now knew they were taking part in a great event. They could move into the future with a certain confidence, knowing that the future belonged to Jesus. An experience with God enables us to catch a glimpse of the future and this in turn gives us a purpose for living.

### **DEAR LORD, HELP ME**

A Roman Catholic nun, 77 years of age, survived a plane crash some years ago. After the event, Sister Mary Viannea told the interviewer,

“After the crash I felt I was in a cocoon all by myself. I just prayed, ‘Dear Lord, help me.’ I prayed in English and in Polish. Then I saw a small opening and I pushed my hand through and someone grabbed it.”

Then she went on to say, “I’m old. I’ve put in a lot of time, but since God saved me, I said, ‘Jesus, if you still want me to go on working, I’m willing.’” And she did. (3)

## THE PRESENCE OF GOD

**TRANSFIGURATIONS ARE MOMENTS WHEN WE EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD THROUGH AN EVENT OR THROUGH ANOTHER PERSON.**

They occur when God is able to communicate with us in some way. Transfigurations assure us that there is a purpose for our being here on earth. Like the nun, we come away from them saying, Jesus, if you still want me to go on working, I’m willing. We are given a reason for being here.

I guess that’s why I’m here this morning. I didn’t retire, really.

Transfiguration assures us that God cares about us. Transfigurations also enable us to live confidently in the present, and we are able to move toward the end of this life with hope and joy.

### A WHITE LIGHT

Those facing death often tell of experiences when they see a white light shining as though a door of heaven had opened and they receive a reassurance that God is with them. That enables them to face their final days with confidence and hope. They have caught a glimpse of the future and that glimpse enables them to live through the pain and suffering in the present.

### GREEN PASTURES

In Marc Connely’s old play called *Green Pastures*, a play with a black cast who act out the Bible story in southern black dialect, we catch a glimpse of an old black man’s faith as he faces death.

In the play, the old black man is Moses. Moses has seen the light in the burning bush, he has

received his call from God. God’s name is revealed to Moses. God’s name is I AM WHO I AM. Moses entered the light of the presence of God on Mount Sinai and received the commandments to be given to all humanity. Moses, empowered with God’s radiance, led the Children of Israel for forty years through the wilderness.

At the end of the play, Moses is very old; he is dying. God has led him up to the top of Mount Nebo from which he can see the Children of Israel, led now by young Joshua, crossing the River Jordan into the Promised Land.

Moses is alone. This is the end. But there is a light there, and Moses whispers, “You’s e with me, ain’t you, Lord?”

And the answer comes back clear and strong: “‘Cose I is, Moses. ‘Cose I is!’” (4)

### IS LOVE BLIND?

The secular world has prejudiced us in such a way that we often miss God’s appearing when it happens. We often feel that the things we can touch and handle are the only realities, and we are instinctively skeptical of that which we get by faith.

We often say that love is blind, but a thoughtful woman who was very much in love once replied, “No, love isn’t blind. Quite the opposite. It has the ability to see some things others cannot see.”

The same can be said for faith. True faith does not blind us to the realities of life, it simply enables us to grasp and understand some things which are otherwise beyond us. It is not that some of us are believers and some are not. It is just that we choose to invest our believing in different places. (5)

### GOD’S LIGHT

At the end of World War I, there was a great Jubilee Service in London’s Royal Albert Hall. Sitting on the platform were various dignitaries and very famous people. Joseph Fort Newton, an American clergyman, was sitting next to George Bernard Shaw. During the service, the audience rose and sang Isaac Watt’s famous old hymn, *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. After they finished, Shaw, moved by the chorus of thousands, leaned over to Newton and said, “I’d rather have written that hymn than all my silly plays.”

For a moment, George Bernard Shaw got a glimpse of God's light. His commitment to rationalism would not allow him to follow that light, but he sensed that it was there. (6)

## GOD'S WONDERS

### GOD MOVES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS, HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM.

Throughout our lives, people and events are transfigured before us, and suddenly God is there with us in all God's glory. But it takes faith – it takes faith for us to see God and to hear God. The early disciples had that faith in those moments on the mountain. When we have that faith, the ordinary events and people in our lives are also transfigured and God is able to bring his messages to us.

### A VISION

One day, the famous old Scottish minister, Arthur Gossip, was visiting his parishioners in a working class district of Glasgow. At four o'clock, after an exhausting day, Gossip stood at the bottom of a five-story tenement where one of his parishioners lived. The parishioner lived on the top floor. It was a long way to the top and the pastor was tired.

Promising himself that he would come back tomorrow, Gossip turned to leave. Then it happened. He saw a vision. In the vision he saw a pair of stooped gray shoulders climbing the steps. He realized it was Jesus. A voice seemed to say, "Then I'll have to go alone."

Gossip suddenly felt revitalized and started up the steps. "We went together," he reported later. (7)

Such stories may sound crazy and foolish to our sophisticated minds at the beginning of this 21st century. We too readily assume that the transfigurations just don't take place, that they are figments of people's imaginations. Well, that may be. But transfigurations may also be God visits to his people, giving them courage and hope in difficult times, calling them into service, renewing and strengthening their faith.

You know, millions of people in our state of California regularly believe that they have a chance to win the California lottery. Now if people can believe that, what is so preposterous about believing

that transfigurations can take place? What is so preposterous about believing that God speaks to us through human events?

The transfiguration reminds us to keep our eyes and ears and minds open, to keep our faith alive so that when God comes to us with his word, we are able to perceive God's word and we're able to receive the love, wisdom and hope that God offers us, and find the meaning and purpose to life that we all need to make life worth living.

Let us be ready when God visits us, because God's amazing grace will come to us. Amen.

- (1) Long, Thomas G. *Shepherds and Bathrobes*, C.C.S. Lima, Ohio, p. 102
- (2) Tuttle, Robert G., *God's Two Hands*, C.C.S. Lima, Ohio, p. 120
- (3) Life, "Finding God on Flight 232," September 1989, Vol. 12, No. 10, p. 30
- (4) *Ibid.* p. 124
- (5) Kalas, Ellsworth, *Reading the Signs*, C.C.S. Lima, Ohio, pp.87-88
- (6) *Dynamic Preaching*, February 1990, Seven Worlds Publishing, Knoxville, TN. p. 22
- (7) *Ibid.* p.25



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