

The Transfiguration seems too big to approach with mere words. The spirit of our age is one of explaining, categorizing and understanding, and that was not even possible for the disciples who actually witnessed the event.

Although Peter, James and John had been with Jesus for some time, they didn't know how to take in what was happening on top of that mountain. They were terrified by the presence of so much shining glory; perhaps weren't even sure they could survive what they were seeing. If we were to permit ourselves to approach the Transfiguration as part of our own lived experience, rather than through words of story and explanation, I believe we would have the same difficulty.

Esther de Waal is a well known author, an expert on Benedictine and Celtic spirituality. Five years ago, she taught a class at General Theological Seminary in New York City. Among other things, she said that when people enter places that completely overwhelm them—such as a grand cathedral or a monumental museum—they tend to gravitate toward the various plaques and signs which dot the walls. The placards which describe *this* stained glass window, or *that* work of art.

She said that people move towards those things as anchors, so that they don't emotionally and spiritually sink in the face of such an overwhelming experience. They can't handle the sheer weight of a soaring vault or one incredible work of art after another, and so they find the little squares with plain writing on them, as a defense mechanism, to get them through the huge presence of whatever is confronting them there.

In a sense, that is what Peter was doing in his first response to the mountain-top vision: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' His rambling words were only stopped by the huge, unearthly voice out of a bright cloud: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' As one commentator said, it is as though God booms out, "Back away from the drawing board."

The disciples fell to the ground, terrified. If they couldn't respond by doing something, how could they live through the in-breaking of a mystery of such cosmic proportions?

After the glory of Jesus glowing like a radiant morning star, after the overpowering voice of God, the vision ended with Jesus coming to his disciples, who were face down on the ground, saying to them, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And this gentle, loving human being touched them for reassurance. Here in the Transfiguration both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus are fully disclosed. Here the disciples, and we, are faced with that which we cannot control – not through words, or psychology, or building little dwellings.

But what if there is another possible response to this great epiphany? The Reverend Rick Morley, points out that after a person is baptized in the Episcopal Church, there is a prayer said for the newly baptized (that’s page 397 in the red Book of Common Prayer). It concludes, “Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.”

The gift of joy and wonder in all God’s works. What if this is the lens through which we might see the Transfiguration? And what if, especially at a time like the one in which we currently live, we desperately need such a way to practice Transfiguration. I believe that the joy and wonder commended to us in the baptismal prayer is lurking on the edges all around us, and what we need most is to pay attention!

Mike Gecan, a community organizer, wrote about visiting his child’s kindergarten class. In the room, he noticed a bulletin board with pictures illustrating what students wanted to learn that year. Most were typical: be a better student, learn to sit still, try to listen more. But one child had said, “I want to know why the ocean shines like fire.” Wow! “I want to know why the ocean shines like fire.” There’s a child in full pursuit of joy and wonder, already practicing Transfiguration. Let us fervently pray that she doesn’t grow out of it.

There is a woman, a long-time member of this congregation, who has gone on the trip to Guatemala several times. While she’s there, in between hammering, or carrying, or painting, she loves taking pictures – especially pictures of the kids, who constantly call out to her, “Foto, lady; mi, mi foto.” She has always said that the children are so beautiful. I believe that she

sees the glory of God looking back at her through their eyes, and experiences Transfiguration.

Recently the chime choir played on two different Sundays, accompanied by Sheglah McLeod on the clarinet. As the kids and adults were focusing fiercely on their music, counting hard and gripping their chimes, the melody moving between them and Shelagh, I swear I could hear the voice of God's glory in the middle of our worship.

I can tell you that when I have the incredible privilege of serving consecrated bread and wine to you at the Eucharist, there are wonderful moments when I can feel the Spirit of God moving among us, and can feel our spirit joining together in response.

Those are moments of bright glory opened up to us. If we can let ourselves notice this brightness of God around and among us, we can begin to gather it into our own practice of prayer. Remember, the Transfiguration of Jesus occurred when he went up on the Mountain to pray. It was in his praying that the fullness of his intimacy with God became so focused that it shone like the sun.

If we will begin to give ourselves times of contemplation and prayer, perhaps especially during the coming Lenten season, we, too, can permit our memories and senses and intellect, to descend into our hearts, where the depth of God's love is always waiting for us. In such moments, we permit ourselves to become a center for God's glory - we are practicing Transfiguration.

Then we no longer have to try figure out how to explain such an experience. We can simply be the ones who carry it out into the world - a world which desperately needs to have us bring this glorious Transfiguration for its healing.