

(A reading from pg. 59 of *have a little faith* by Mitch Albom – quoting Rabbi Albert Lewis.)

The simple act of looking at someone is so important...really looking at them. They say that our eyes are a window to our soul. When we look right at someone we can really see them, and focus our attention on them.

Now, imagine those Israelites wandering in the desert. They are tired of camping, tired of having not enough to eat and drink, tired of being homeless and carrying all of their belongings as they trudge along day after day, hoping that finally they will reach the land that they have been promised. At least back in Egypt they had a roof over their heads. At least back in Egypt there was enough to eat and drink.

No wonder they got antsy and frustrated waiting for Moses who keeps stopping to climb mountains. No wonder they decided to hedge their bets and pray to a god they made from the gold collected from amongst themselves. Hey, after all they had no chocolate, no TV, no iphone apps, so a golden calf would have to do.

But they did love their leader, Moses. If they didn't they would never have gotten as far as they did. They realized that he was God's man. But they were not listening to Moses with their eyes when he came down the mountain the first time. Their attention was focused elsewhere. No wonder he became very angry with his people when he came down the mountain with God's commandments and threw them on the ground. But, he did not give up on the people and they did not give up on him. Moses went up the mountain a second time, and in the passage we hear today from the Book of Exodus, the people, who were paying attention this time, could see that the light of God shone in the face of Moses after his encounter with the Holy One. This time they listened...listened with their eyes, and so, with their whole selves. This time they heard the commandments that God had given them. And

this time....they were afraid by what they saw. This time they saw so much that they wanted Moses to cover his face so that they would not see all that brightness, so much of the glory of God shining in his face..

How can we imagine what this is like, seeing God's glory in the face of a person? I think about times when someone has come to me excited by a new idea or an insight they have had, a new book they have read, or a project they have found. We use words to describe that sort of thing that we might say about Moses. We say that someone's eyes sparkled or that their smile lit up their face. We speak of light reflected that tells us about the person's whole self. We see the glory of God reflected in the faces of those around us.

So, now let's imagine what it must have been like if we had been with Peter, James and John, trudging up a mountain - more than a 1000 years after our story of Moses and the Israelites. We're breathless trying to keep up with Jesus climbing steadily ahead of us, and we're excited because of all the disciples, Jesus has chosen us to accompany him on this journey.

As we walk we think about all the recent events that have taken place: Jesus chose his disciples, (both men and women as Luke's gospel tells it.) He preached on the mount and on the plain. John the Baptist, the great prophet who pointed the way to Jesus has been beheaded by Herod. Jesus has healed many sick people and crowds are beginning to gather wherever he goes. And, most recently, 8 days ago, Peter made a great announcement to all that he understood Jesus to be the Messiah. We call that Peter's Confession. And at that time Jesus revealed that he would undergo great suffering, be rejected and killed, and then would be raised on the third day. That was a lot to take in at one time.

But there's nothing like a long hike to give yourself a chance to process all this that has happened in such a short time. Reaching the top of the mountain, Jesus asks us to pray with him. As we sit down, close our eyes, and try to get our breathing back under control, we feel the exhaustion of the recent days' events catching up.

We think to ourselves as we settle into prayer, “You know, this would be a perfect time, away from the crowds, to catch up on a little sleep.” But, no, We mustn’t let ourselves sleep. Jesus has given us the honor of asking us to come with him up this mountain to pray and it would be very disrespectful to fall asleep when he has asked us to pray. So, despite our tiredness, we stay awake and pray with Jesus. And when after a time we open our eyes and look at Jesus and he seems quite different. He appears glorious and dazzling and a reflection of God himself. And with our eyes wide open now we also see the figures of Elijah and Moses in some form talking to Jesus. We think to ourselves, it is one thing to say and acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord as Peter did eight days ago, it is quite another thing to experience the glory of God in the face of Jesus right in front of you.

And then....God speaks . Who wouldn’t be terrified. “This is my son , my Chosen; listen to him!” And then, just as quickly as it happened the moment is over. Elijah and Moses are gone. Jesus looks as he did before and it is time to start back down the mountain. Did it really happen at all? Would anyone believe us if we told them? Better to keep it to ourselves. Is that why many who have had life altering holy experiences keep quiet about it? Who would believe it anyway?

Jesus has allowed us to see this glory face to face, through him always, and as St. Paul says, we have being transformed by God’s glory. There is no veil to protect us or shield us or hide us from the direct experience of God through the people and experiences we have every day. We listen to Jesus with our eyes every time we pray to him.

And we don’t have to make the long trip up to the top of the mountain to see God’s glory; it is there in the face of a child, in a sparkling field of snow, in a clear starry night, or in the smiling countenance of a friend or a stranger.

We have reached the end of the season of light, the season of Epiphany. Taken together, the birth of Jesus and the Transfiguration of Jesus stand like bookends to that part of the life of

Jesus in which he is revealed to us; from the time of his birth as a vulnerable and very human baby to this time of seeing the divinity of Jesus in the blinding light in which he is revealed in glory. As we head into Lent and the Passion we have learned about who Jesus is and the light of the Father he brings to us.

You may notice that each time something important happens in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus prays. Jesus was praying at his baptism and God appeared. When crowds pressed in on him asking for healing, he withdrew to a deserted place and prayed. He was praying with his disciples at his transfiguration, and we know that soon, in the Garden of Gethsemane he will be praying again as the time of his passion approaches.

We should be getting a message here. The message is that when we want to be close to God we need to pray too. And, of course, that is why you and I are here. But with Lent around the corner, I want us to take this opportunity to learn more, to pray more and to deepen our conscious contact with God who loves us and gives us life.

In this Lenten season there are multiple opportunities for you to learn about Jesus and his Church and to pray with Jesus and to let that light transform us, accompany us in our journey of faith. If we wish to do so, we have to intentionally put ourselves in a place and time so that that may happen, a mountaintop, here at Trinity, or in another holy place. We have to show up if we want a deeper experience of God.

We can begin to show up by being here for Shrove Tuesday and a lively evensong and pancake dinner, and by beginning a right Lent by coming to receive ashes this Wednesday at either noon or 6 PM.

Alexis Dorf and I will be leading a study called “Being Present to the Presence” every Sunday between the services. We will look at spiritual practices throughout the ages and we will study the scripture that grounds those practices, and we will practice them too.

We will be participating in an ecumenical book study with Salisbury Congregational and St. Mary's Catholic Church every Tuesday morning or Tuesday evening, you have your choice of times. Together the group will read and discuss the book *Christianity for the Rest of Us* by Diana Butler Bass.

Also, I will be here for noonday prayer every day that the office is open throughout the Lenten season.

So, there is something for everyone, whether you are here on weekends or during the week, whether you can't get to a class at night, or nighttime is the only time you are available.

Finally, this morning, I want to leave you with a thought. If that little girl that Rabbi Al talked about in his sermon were here this morning, I bet we would all be sure to take the time to listen to her with our eyes. We need to look at someone square in the eyes to see the radiance that is God's glory in another person's face. I suggest that when you pass the peace to your neighbors in the pews this morning, be sure to look them in the eye. Tell them that God's peace is with them so that they really know it. And since it is Christ that is speaking through each one of us – one to another – listen to him with eyes, ears and hearts wide open.