

Get up and do not be afraid. These are words to live by. These are words that Jesus speaks to you and me...right now.

The disciples agreed to go with Jesus up the mountain expecting a happy restful time away from the crowds and the work of their ministry. Some of the more mundane things that might have been said on that day: "Let's go for a hike." I'll bring some food. Who will bring the water? Does everyone have good shoes for a 3,000 long hike?" Let your family know we'll be away all day, and maybe most of the evening too. And we'd better get an early start. Can we all meet at foot of the mountain at sunup and we'll go from there?

The going must have been long and dusty and difficult. But arriving at the top they would have had a bird's eye view of the surrounding lands of Palestine with none of the modern day disruptions of smog and airplane noise to distract from the quiet, stark beauty of the place.

Once up there, and having caught their breath, Peter, saw a vision of Moses and Elijah and just started babbling away about building dwellings or booths, but as he is speaking, God interrupts him. The gospel story says that the disciples fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. The disciples received a shock that they weren't expecting. They heard God's voice. They weren't so much excited to hear the voice as they were frightened. Then what did Jesus do? He came and touched them and said, "Get up and do not be afraid."

I put a picture of the stained glass windows from our church (which are now in residence at Stained Glass Resources) on the front of our bulletin for today because I feel like this is an important mountaintop time for us as a congregation. Work is being done to diligently reconstruct our windows for the next hundred years plus.

We have put a lot of our own money on the line. We have stepped out into the unknown...although to be sure Susanna, Pari and others have done a LOT of research and spent many hours interviewing and weighing the alternatives. And yet, just as we got to our own mountaintop, after many months of effort and many gratefully received donations and pledges, it's a little scary to see our window in pieces on a table. And we received some news that was also not what we were expecting or hoping for.

We have to both absorb the shock of the price tag we were given for the damaged window frame and wisely consider if this is the only path we have open to us. Should we consider other alternatives?

We are both at the same time faithful Christians willing to walk by faith AND logical thinkers and responsible human beings. We believe that God came to that mountain of transfiguration, AND we have practical matters of engineering and costs in front of us.

I wonder what it was like for William Barnum and Leonard Richardson, the partners of the very successful iron ore company of our town in the mid to late 1800s who built this church. Did they meet with several craftsmen of the time in the realm of stained glass, or was there only one who did all the work in the churches being built in the area at the time? Did they question the costs of such a huge undertaking of the four paneled window above the altar, or were they wealthy enough (in that day's standards) to just OK whatever the craftsmen told them? They too must have at some point said OK, we'll leave it in your hands to produce this window for us.

It's kind of awesome to imagine what their mountaintop experience must have been like. They were faithful men who wanted to build a monument to the glory of God and to be able to experience their own close-to-God experience right in Lime Rock along with their employees.

Matthew is one of our most rational gospel writers. He has scenes of Jesus sitting and telling stories to his disciples, teaching them through parables, and solving problems of the people. There aren't as many scenes in Matthew of miraculous cures as there are in the other three Gospels.

And yet, maybe that's just as it should be. Our own lives are, for the most part, practical and filled with days of problem solving and getting things done. It isn't very often that we have moments where God appears on the scene in a big way.

We live in a rational world. People who go around talking about how they've been blinded by the light of God, or that they've seen Jesus, are sometimes not taken too seriously. I wonder if that was the case in Jesus' day too. After all, why does Jesus tell his disciples not to talk about this to anyone? "Tell no one about the vision until the son of man has been raised from the dead." He may not have wanted his disciples to seem like crazies who climb mountains and see God.

And so, as we think about our Gospel reading this morning, and remember the brightness and clarity of the colors of our windows, we wonder what God would say to us now in our situation. The vivid blues and reds and greens of the images of Christ that we remember call us to a closer relationship with Jesus. And the white boards we see now (temporarily) are a bit frightening. AND yet, we must go through the difficulties of seeing just the white plywood in order to enjoy a more beautiful return of clearer, brighter images, and know that people in the year 2170, 150 years from now, will thank us for having the foresight and fortitude to save these windows for generations yet to come. As Alexis Dorf used to say, "We plant trees under which we will not sit." It's our faithfulness and foresight that keeps this in view.

And we must remember at the same time that we are sitting under trees that others have planted! Our Christmas tree, so beautiful each year, is not of our doing. This beautiful building, and its structural strengths is not of our doing. The purchase of the Trinity Reid field, and the building of our parish hall where we will enjoy Chocolate Sunday very soon is not of our doing. We are very fortunate recipients of the good works of our spiritual forebears.

When we can step back from the brink of our anxious thoughts about windows and large price tags and see things as God might see our church, our efforts, ourselves - if we are on that mountaintop with Jesus, and we can feel a sense of clarity and peace, not of fear and anxiety.

We are heading into Lent now. We are meant to hold on to transfiguration experiences to last us through Lent, just as the disciples, Peter, James and John needed to hang on to their transfiguration experience to last them as they trudged to into Jerusalem.

Aren't we prepared for our Lenten journey? With wise and faithful people we will walk by faith, and also with intelligence, resourcefulness and diligence. The windows will not be back in place by Easter. We'll both live with that and we know that it's important to not rush into any plan, but take our time.

Our Easter will come to us. These windows will rise once again.