

² Six days later, 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 clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

I don't believe I've ever heard someone say, "I'm a Methodist, but I'm not practicing." Have you? I've heard it from Jewish friends and from Catholic friends, but never a Methodist.

Some of you are more familiar with the term in your work. All of us are familiar with someone saying they have a law practice, or they practice law. You've heard people say, I'm a doctor, but I stopped practicing medicine years ago. I always thought it was kinda funny that we say a doctor practices medicine but performs surgery. But then again, we'd be a little uneasy about the term 'practice' when it involves someone holding a scalpel.

As a young piano student, I hated practice--it never seemed to be going anywhere, the progress was too slow. I watched as my dad could improvise on a theme as if the music just shot out of his fingers, and I couldn't imagine that it was possible to get from Point A to point B.

Later, as an athlete, though, I found that I loved practice. Loved practice, hated to race. Practice was enjoyable, but challenging. It was steady and predictable. Practice relieved stress, while racing caused it. I was at my best when I set aside the upcoming race, trusted the process of practicing, and simply focused on the day's workout--the glide of the boat, the rhythm of the oars, the strength I felt in my own body, and the connection with others.

I think perhaps it is the same with our faith. We long to encounter God, we long for our lives--our ordinary, daily lives that involve grocery shopping and working and paying bills and shuttling people to doctor appointments and replacing light bulbs and filing TPS reports and all of these things--we long for something in there to intersect the holy. For us to have a daily run-in with something sacred, something from God or of God, something that makes us remember that God really is near. This is why we practice the faith.

The Christian faith, as I just told our Basic Christianity class this morning, it is not a faith that is simply meant for believing in, or assenting to. It's not a series of doctrinal boxes to check to determine if you are eligible for eternal life. No, Christian faith is nothing if it is not practiced. And so this Lent, during this six week period that leads us to Easter, we are inviting one another to practice.

Brennan Manning says that "the American Church today accepts grace in theory but denies it in practice." We accept grace in theory, but deny it in practice. It's not worth much in your life or in God's

kingdom to accept the concept of grace; so what would it be like instead to practice grace. Lord knows, some of us have to practice it to believe it anyway, so what might it do for your faith to spend a season intentionally practicing grace? To practice living in God's presence through prayer. Practice receiving and sharing all that God is giving to you. Practice the intentional rhythm of starting the week with worship in this space. To practice it without any pressure for performance, no certain goal in mind; just to simply focus on the practicing. To infuse our day-in-day-out, week-in-week-out lives with the motions, the movements that open us up to God. Confession. Worship. Prayer. Fasting. Giving. Service. Submission. Celebration.

This is our focus for Lent. We hope you'll take advantage of the ways we are hoping to help you practice these Spiritual Disciplines throughout the season; you'll see on your weekly word several opportunities to engage in one or more of these--we've suggested that for this season you try out two, and see what God might do.

It is a little bit of a twist to preach on the first practice, the practice of worship, at the very moment when we are engaged in it. It's a bit like preaching to the choir; what do you say about the practice of worship to the people who are here...to worship. It's hard to find the words...

Peter certainly had trouble finding words.

Standing atop the mountain with his buddies James and John, dragged up there by Jesus, he finds that yet another climb up the mountain with his teacher...well, it has become more than yet another regular climb up the mountain. No sooner do they get up the mountain does Jesus transfigure, and light comes shining, gleaming from his clothes. And then there's Moses and Elijah, embodiments of the Jewish law and the prophets, and they are--what are they doing?--they are conferencing with Jesus!

Peter interrupts--"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here--let's make three tents, one for each of you, and you guys can just camp out here, and, you know, keep this good thing going." In my mind, a modern-day Peter would have pulled out his phone and snapped a few pics, maybe add a cool filter to tone down those crazy-white, shining clothes of Jesus.

So Peter interrupts with this tent suggestion, and then my favorite verse follows--Mark kinda sticks up for Peter, poor Peter with his silly tent idea--Mark defends him, saying, "He didn't know what to say, for they were terrified!" He might as well have said, "Hey, listen, you wouldn't have done much better, ok?"

We don't do so well with awesome, do we?

When it comes to the spiritual life, Brennan Manning is a great sage of our time, so I think it's fitting to quote him twice today. He tells about an enthusiastic young man who had just received his plumber's license and was taken to see Niagara Falls. He studied it for a minute and then said, "Yeah, I think I can fix this."

We don't do so well with awesome, do we? We can't help but tame it; to put it in a house or a tent; to capture it in a photo or try to stage it again. We get preoccupied, like Peter, with what we think we are supposed to be saying or doing, how we should respond, what we should say next--am I supposed to kneel now? Is it weird if I clap or say Amen? Whether we are gathered on Sunday morning or sitting in an office cubicle, when God does something, when something moves in us or in the universe, we want to look to our neighbor and say, "Did you feel that?" "Was that just me?"

Peter didn't have to do anything. Just be there, in the moment with Jesus. Just be open and awake and alive to the experience of God, right there, in front of his face.

That's worship, friends. And Peter nearly missed it! He got so caught up with whether the experience was what it ought to be, whether he was doing what he was supposed to be doing, that he nearly missed the voice of God calling out to him!

It is the fatal flaw of a consumer culture that we approach worship wondering if it is, or was, good enough. Was the music good? Did it feed me? Was it full, or awkwardly empty? Did she knock it out of the park, or was it just a swing and a miss?

What if the only question we asked each other about worship was, "Was God there?" If, perchance, the answer was "Yes," how else could we respond, but to simply say, "Wow..." "Wow, I don't know what it was, or what it means, but God was THERE."

In Marilynne Robinson's beautiful novel, *Gilead*, the main character, a Pastor, says, "Sometimes I have loved the peacefulness of an ordinary Sunday. It is like standing in a newly planted garden after a warm rain. You can feel the silent and invisible life. All it needs from you is that you take care not to trample on it."

What we do when we show up on Sunday morning is to make ourselves available to God. To come, with arms open, ready for the rain; not to come because we are the kind of people who go to worship every Sunday morning--who knows, you may not be that kind of person at all--but to come because in this encounter, God will grow something in us--something less like us, and more like Jesus.

You know, we always say that every time you read scripture you notice a little something different--the Holy Spirit, perhaps, points out something new. When I read this passage one time this week, I noticed that Jesus doesn't speak to the disciples at all on the mountain. After Peter's failed suggestion, immediately after that, we hear the voice of God from the cloud: "This is my son, the Beloved. Listen to Him." Then, down the mountain they go. So, in the midst of this mountain-top experience, this definitive moment of experiencing the presence of God and the divinity of Jesus as God's son, the words they heard from God had nothing to do with what they were seeing. Nothing to do with what it meant. Nothing about what to do, or how to respond to this incredible, life-altering vision. Just, "Listen to him." In the days to come--listen to him. In your everyday life--listen to him. When you are down off the mountain--listen to him. In the midst of this powerful, holy experience, God's gives instructions about what to do when they encounter Jesus in the day-to-day life ahead of them. They can expect to hear Jesus speak; their response is simply to listen.

Isn't it true that even in these times of worship, these moments together, where we encounter God in prayer and preaching and song and sacrament, God is pushing us to look ahead. Look ahead, pay attention to when we can expect to encounter Christ when we leave this place, when day-to-day life resumes. Open your ears when you are on the street, when you are in your office or your kitchen, when you are on the treadmill or in the car. Do not expect that this, here, will be the only place you encounter God this week. This is my son--see him, in dazzling white? Take a good look; he may not look the same, but you should expect to see him again--tomorrow, later today. Expect to hear his voice, not just echoing in the sanctuary, but on the path of your everyday life. And when you hear him, listen. Listen. Listen.