

*28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not realizing what he was saying. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. 37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." 41 Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." 42 While he was being brought forward, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. 43a And all were astounded at the greatness of God.*

Before I write my sermons, I try to live with the scripture all week, keeping it rattling around in my head everywhere I go. I can't tell you how many times I've mutter, "faithless and perverse generation," under my breath this week. It really sticks with you after a while! It seems a harsh criticism from Jesus, but then again, he has just been up on a mountaintop getting a pep talk from dead ancestors about how to endure a pretty horrific death with grace, only to come down the mountain and find that nothing below has changed. He is busy loving the world and heading toward his death to prove it, and they are still at the bottom of the mountain bickering amidst their pain, and fear, and brokenness. I've no doubt he was cranky, because he had to be wondering, that human part of him that would feel the pain of death, was it going to be worth it? Would the world learn anything by it and do better...be better? We want to think people astounded by the greatness of God will...we really want to believe that.

But let's go back up the mountain a minute and think about what happens up there as Jesus is praying for the path that lies ahead and the people who will walk it with him. As he prayed, we learn, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes glowed white. Now we don't know exactly what this means...was this some portal between heaven and earth that opened and allowed him to stand in the liminal space between and talk to Moses and Elijah? I have no idea. All we know is there was a bright light and Jesus suddenly looked different to those who were watching. They saw something in him they had not seen before. The original Greek work is what we know as metamorphosis...he went through some kind of change...or did he?

The other think I do, while living with a scripture for a week, is change 100 rabbit trails about things I'm curious about...like the word metamorphosis. Did you know that over 60% of insect species go through metamorphosis? Of course, most of us think of the butterfly more than any other because it is perhaps the most dramatic and beautiful. An egg is laid, a larva hatches, and the caterpillar eats and eats and

eats and gains as much bulk as it can, shedding layers of skin each time it grows, until it is big enough and then hangs upside down and forms a cocoon and...and...well...there is where some mystery begins. It seems like I remember being taught that the caterpillar kind of dissolves into a caterpillar soup and somehow from that soup the structure of a butterfly begins to form. It makes it seem as if the caterpillar is one thing and then some of its parts, upon its dying, become a new thing. But we know now that isn't true. The truth is, the butterfly was in the caterpillar all along. As it eats and sheds layers of skin, it is also forming wing buds and a skeletal system that will someday emerge in the beautiful radiance of a butterfly...one that was there all along, unseen.

So, I find it interesting Luke chose a word like metamorphosis to describe what happens on the mountaintop. Jesus isn't changed; he is revealed. This isn't an act of Jesus becoming something he wasn't before...it is the true being of Jesus that has been present all along...the Messiah...the son of God...the beloved one...becoming visible in all his glory.

Peter sees but doesn't understand. He knows this is something astounding and he wants to hold on to it. Why? Because 8 days ago Jesus told him about the road to the cross. Eight days ago, Jesus said death was on the horizon and even though resurrection was just beyond, Peter had no desire to get there any time soon. Who would?

I'm not sure how he recognized Moses and Elijah, I doubt they had name tags, but perhaps Moses had his staff and Elijah his mantle and Peter just knew these great men of faith by how they looked. But he also knew them for what they endured. Moses, 40 years in the wilderness, enduring hardship and conflict and, at times, rebellion. Elijah, a prophet called upon to lead God's people, hounded so viciously by Jezebel, the evil queen, that he went into the wilderness and begged to die. Great men of God but their time serving God had been rough.

Other Gospels share this story, but I think only Luke lets Peter eavesdrop on the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah...they are talking about his exodus...his departure plan. Who, better than these two honored servants to be there to offer Jesus' wisdom, encouragement, and strength to carry the cross that was waiting. But Peter isn't ready. Peter wants to hit the pause button on God's plan...because it sounds hard, and challenging, and heartbreaking...even with resurrection waiting on the other side.

What do you think your response would have been? What is it now, when following Jesus means we move ahead into tough places in which we will face a broken world that will lash out and harm, more than embrace and love? Will we too want to hit pause and hunker down – that's southern biblical jargon – and try to keep our heads only in places that are glorious and beautiful and meaningful and edifying for our soul? Or will we be listen to God's call to follow Jesus, even if it means taking up the cross? Which, I will add, doesn't mean a call to die...Jesus said, carry it, not die on it...carry it...the burden of loving the world, even when it is broken...the burden of loving your enemies, even when they are seeking to harm...the burden of loving those who the world has abandoned and turned against and left to struggle on their own. "This is my son, my chosen, listen to him." God says

Are we listening? Or are we building tents to hold our sacred truths and offering nothing to the world below? Jesus is the answer to our world's healing, but as was evident at the foot of the mountain, we need to be up to the task of being part of that healing. Then, and only then, will we ALL be astounded by the greatness of God.