

hearts and minds may be opened. Amen. understanding that our

Exodus 24:12-18 Common English Bible (CEB)

**12** The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. I’ll give you the stone tablets with the instructions and the commandments that I’ve written in order to teach them.”

**13** So Moses and his assistant Joshua got up, and Moses went up God’s mountain. **14** Moses had said to the elders, “Wait for us here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur will be here with you. Whoever has a legal dispute may go to them.”

**15** Then Moses went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. **16** The Lord’s glorious presence settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from the cloud. **17** To the Israelites, the Lord’s glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain. **18** Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

### **Matthew 17:1-9**

Common English Bible (CEB)

#### **Jesus’ transformation**

**17** Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. <sup>2</sup>He was transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.

<sup>3</sup>Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup>Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good that we’re

here. If you want, I'll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

<sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!”<sup>6</sup>Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe.

<sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don't be afraid.” <sup>8</sup>When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don't tell anybody about the vision until the Human One<sup>la</sup> is raised from the dead.”

This is the word of God for us, the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The Mystery of It All!

Imagine being present on top of that high mountain with Peter, James and John. Imagine your view from a place like Mount Magazine or maybe even a mountain in the Rockies! Imagine seeing the face of Jesus beside you shining like the sun. His clothes becoming white as light. Imagine seeing Moses, whom God gave the law, and Elijah, the prophet.

Something holy and mysterious is going on.

Imagine holding your breath in anticipation.

How would you react?

Would you freeze in place?

Would you wait in wonder?

Would you listen and watch?

Or would you spring into action like Peter and say, “Don’t just stand there..... do something.” We’ve got plans to make, we’ve got shrines to build.

Despite Peter’s interruption of our holy moment, a bright cloud comes over -- it casts a shadow over everything around you. And a deep voice interrupts Peter’s

jabbering. A voice comes from within the cloud and says, “This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with Him. Listen to him.”

The mystery of this experience is overwhelming-- and Peter reacts like many of us might. Peter always seems to be a man of action, and we certainly see his personality coming out in this story. After the resurrection, Peter gained this rock-steady maturity and faith. Peter even means the rock – and Jesus gave him that name. But not yet! Peter is not yet the rock. Right now Peter is acting kind of crazy! I can imagine the other two disciples just looking at him thinking, “What is he talking about???” He just speaks and acts without restraint--blurting out his plan of action to build shines up there on the mountain.

It’s kind of his mode of operation. You may remember a similar story from Matthew 14. Peter jumps out of a boat during a storm to walk on the water with Jesus. You may remember the story in Matthew 16 when Peter slices off a

Roman guard's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Don't just stand there, do something" is certainly Peter's motto.

I think Peter is comfortable being busy, and building these shrines is the first thing that pops into his head. It is his way of gaining control. His plan of action keeps this mysterious experience within his comfort zone. The mystery of it all is confusing to him and maybe he would rather just avoid it all together.

But God has a way of getting our attention, especially if we are clinging to our zone of comfort. If we are too busy talking, God will certainly get our attention somehow. Peter is talking so much that God even had to interrupt him to speak! The scripture says that while Peter was still talking, God broke in to speak!

In my studies this week, I read these words about this story of Jesus' transformation: "The church has, at the same time, loved this story and not known what to do with it. It is

mysterious – beyond our everyday experience – difficult to understand.”

It is mysterious – beyond our everyday experience – difficult to understand.

And when we experience something difficult to understand and beyond our everyday experience – we are uncomfortable with it, and don't we often want to just do something. Don't we often want to draw back a mysterious, unexplainable experience of God into our everyday experience so that we are in control of it. But, St. Augustine said that If you understand it, it is not God.

Several years ago, the leader at the Arkansas Tech Wesley Foundation, died --- it was an extremely difficult time for everyone who knew him--he was young, he had no known health problems, and it was a real shock. He was a man who clearly walked with God. He was the face of Jesus to many people, young and old alike. He was well-loved, and his loss was a crushing blow. The day it happened, one of my friends reacted by needing something to do, wanting to stay busy. She told me the

way she reacted to death was to shop – she wanted to buy the family food and toilet paper and whatever kinds of things they might need during this time. And many of us do that! It can be very helpful to the family. Sometimes in tough times, in times when the presence of God is a total mystery to us -- we want something to do. It helps us feel in control.

But it can also keep us from listening to God and listening to what's going on within us. Our busyness can even be an excuse for avoiding close relationships both with God and with people. We would rather “do something” than just be present with a grieving family or even to experience our own pain. It's a way for us to bring an unusual experience into our everyday experience. We ignore the mystery of it all. We fail to draw near to God in the moment. We prefer to **do something**, don't we?

But sometimes, I think those of us who like to be busy all the time need to hear this, turn that phrase around to: Don't just do something, stand there!” Sometimes, we need to just experience

the unexplainable mystery of life and of God's presence with us. So, today, would you give yourselves permission to just stand there, to wait for God, to experience the awe-inspiring nature of God and to appreciate the mystery of a God. Lent begins this week, and we will have 40 days to practice this -- and through our upcoming sermon series, we will be sharing with you some practical ways to be more intentional about setting aside busyness and resting in God.

Now don't get me wrong, there is a time for action. In fact, immediately after this transfiguration experience, Jesus goes down to the valley and heals a boy who is possessed by a demon. There is a time for us to go out into the world shining God's light through the work that we do. God's work awaits us. But there **must first** be a time to listen to and to appreciate the mystery and the power of God at work. If we don't listen to God, how will we know what work we are called to do? Hopefully before we rush down the mountain, we will sit in the mystery of God. Hopefully we will be intentional

about filling our lives with God's power through prayer and studying and reflection and meditation--through worship and silence before God.

Instead of just doing something – any old thing to be busy, how about if we do something worthwhile – how about if we do what God wants us to do? How about if we focus our actions on our mission after we have spent some time in God's presence?

Our actions are more likely to be led by the spirit of God if we first take time to listen to God. Our actions are more likely to bear fruit if we listen and then obey. Just like Peter, our busyness and our own talking can sometimes stand in the way of our hearing.

Let me tell you about a woman who experienced the mystery of God and listened to Jesus. Then she responded, not just with busyness but with a purpose and with the power of God behind her. Rachel Sparkowich was a stay-at-home mom leading what appeared to be the perfect life in New Hampshire. But beneath the surface there were problems. It

had gotten so bad that Rachel says of that time in her life, "I did not want to live." In her desperation she prayed to God, "If you are real, if you will get me out of this and make everything better, I will serve you the rest of my life."

Some days later, Rachel was driving her car when she felt the overwhelming presence of God. Deeply moved, she began to cry. She had to pull off the road. She says:

"As I sat there, I felt this deep, deep love and compassion. I felt so much pain for people who were hurting, and I didn't even know anyone who was hurting. I felt God calling me to serve the poor. I thought, *This can't be me.*"

A few days later, Rachel visited the home of a woman from her prayer group. When the woman opened her refrigerator, it contained only a jar of mayonnaise, a bottle of ketchup and a dish of spaghetti. Rachel went to the grocery store and bought her a bag of food. Then she invited people from her church to help. She soon found herself involved in ministry to needy people. And it grew and grew. And so she

gave her project a name—Operation Blessing—a ministry that began with one bag of groceries.

People from Rachel's church continued to bring donations, and Rachel continued to give them to needy people. Since 1995, Operation Blessing has served 187,000 people. Rachel says,

"Transforming people's lives means a lot more to me than just giving away food. This is the greatest joy of my life."

In our Gospel lesson today, Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured and heard a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. LISTEN to him." In like manner, but in differing ways, God reveals Jesus to us, too, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. LISTEN to him." The ministry that became Rachel's life's work began through a mysterious encounter with God -- it was an experience where she begged for God's presence--and she listened intently. If we

aren't open to resting in the mystery of God, if we are constantly doing, we may miss God's voice entirely!

You see, **Jesus** didn't ask Peter to build three shrines on the mountaintop – that was Peter reacting by wanting to **do something** instead of standing there first. That was Peter being busy without enjoying God's mysterious presence and without listening for God's direction. But after the resurrection, Jesus did ask Peter to get busy. Jesus did call Peter to action. Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep." And that is when Peter became the rock on which the church was built. He listened, and then he obeyed.

When Rachel Sparkowich took the time to cry out to God, to listen to the response, and to obey that call --- there was a modern day transfiguration. God transformed her life from the inside out; it transformed her community; and it transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of needy people. Her obedience brought joy to her and to so many others.

At first God did not call Rachel to build a warehouse to serve thousands of families—although in time she would do that. At first, God called her to buy a bag of groceries for a woman who had no food in her refrigerator. As Rachel was faithful to that small call, God began giving her a greater vision that led to greater responsibilities. Operation Blessing began with one woman crying out to God and then listening. Operation Blessing is the result of many years of faithfulness and spiritual growth.

The power of God is displayed in amazing ways. God still appears to us today. And when we experience the glory of God, we can't help but be transformed – we can't help but fall to our faces in awe. God appears on mountaintops, and in our cars on the side of the road, and at a place called Operation Blessing and even in the face of a devastating death. Mysterious and holy moments with God happen here and now in all kinds of unexpected ways and in unusual places and at surprising times in our lives.

Friends, Lent begins Wednesday with Ash Wednesday service at 5:30. My challenge for you this week is to get comfortable with the mystery of God-come to the Ash Wednesday service -- and before you come would you pray that you would experience the mystery of God and be prepared to listen. Not only that, but would you lean in to some new ways of experiencing God over the next 40 days.

We don't have to have all the answers. And we can trust God to be in control of our very lives. So would you spend some time in God's presence -- just listening --- not doing.

God will show up. And we will be transformed by the mystery of it all.

Let us pray.

God we admit that we are way too busy. We confess that we would rather **do** something, and do it **our** way rather than wait for you. We are uncomfortable with your mystery, and we would rather be in control of things we can never

control. So God, teach us to draw near to your presence.  
Transform us by the power of your love. Teach us to be  
your people and to walk in your ways. Holy one, this day,  
we fall down before you in awe and ask for more of you  
presence in our lives. In the name of the Father and the Son  
and the Holy Spirit. Amen

## Benediction

May God shine the light of glory into your hearts.

May Christ be with you and never leave you.

And may the Spirit renew the image of God within you.

Now go in peace to love and serve the Lord,