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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Exodus 24:12-18  
Matthew 17:1-9

## **CLOUDS WITH SILVER LININGS**

For some unknown reason, we in the church don't care much for mysteries. I don't think it is all Calvin's fault with his white-washed sanctuaries. I think we're especially uncomfortable with mysteries—like the words shared when Jesus was baptized, and today, at his transfiguration. Our response to mysteries is likely more what Peter, James, and John experienced. Our response may be identical to theirs if we're willing to admit that in the presence of God's mystery and God's power, often we speak too much and listen too little.

If I'd come into the sanctuary today as a worshipper and seen the sermon title, I wouldn't have liked it. I don't like the easy answers that we often come up with to complex problems. Every cloud has a silver lining. That may be a mysterious wisdom saying that contains more truth than I want to confront. You see, being a disciple of Christ becomes a little more difficult if I'm forced to contemplate that the path where God is leading us, leading me, doesn't always come with self-disclosed awareness. There are times when we simply have to live through the unknown. There are times when death overcomes us with grief. There are times when we experience disloyalty from those whom we least expected to be less un-genuine. There are times when it seems that our loneliness is so immense that it is like a cloud covering everything else in our lives.

The unknown—the mysterious—is for us a difficult discipline to live through. The Greek word for mystery turns out to mean simply to close one's mouth or lips. So in the presence of mystery, when fear is gripping our hearts, when we are confronted with a "what now?" situation, we have to work hard to train ourselves to be still and listen; listening beyond ourselves, listening to the beloved, my son. Peter sees Jesus transfigured and Peter does what we often do. There's that initial adrenaline rush when fear grips him, and he responds to the mystery with, I think, a very acceptable and respectful response, a word, a plan. There is the divine right in front of him, and what Peter proposes really makes a lot of sense.

You see, this building where we are worshipping today was meant to be a response and is in its best sense a response to the divine. This sanctuary was built in part because people experienced the mystery of God's presence. They heard within these walls God's voice; but in the words of someone else, God's amazing mysterious grace. Maybe it was in numerous someone "elses," but people experienced God the divine, and they wanted to create a place where they could experience it again and again—a dwelling so they could come back and enter the mystery.

When we hear about the Holy Spirit, when we talk about God at work in one another, when we consider that there is power and wonder that goes beyond what we can finally explain, we know it's time to pay attention, but we're not completely comfortable. I especially like the last part of the Exodus passage and the passage that we shared from

Matthew. They demonstrate the way that God comes to us, touches us, and completely redefines our lives. And it's not always as complicated as we want to make it. It's not always beyond our ability to experience a transcendent God in our homes and in our lives.

Sometimes the solution to moral and spiritual transformation is really not that complicated at all. There was an auto mechanic who received a repair order and the order said to check for a clunking noise when going around curves. So the mechanic took the car out for a test drive and made two right turns. Each time, sure enough, he heard a loud clunking noise. He returned to the shop, gave the keys back to his supervisor, and handed him this note: "Removed bowling ball from trunk."

Sometimes the answer is so obvious to our spiritual trepidation—the times when we don't know what to do next. Jesus says to us, get up and do not be afraid. The cloud has disappeared. Moses and Elijah are gone. At that moment, Jesus is very much a flesh and blood Savior again. Everything is back to normal, or at least as normal as it can be, given what Jesus was facing after this time on the mountain. Jesus says to us, get up, don't be afraid. When your heart is broken, when you don't think you cannot endure the agony any longer, know that I have gone there before you. Get up, remember that I have endured the struggle, I have felt the suffering, I was beaten and mobbed so that you might find comfort and solace in this life. Get up; that cloud that terrified you, it's not here any longer.

Jesus did all of this knowing what would happen to him when he returned to Jerusalem, and he still said to his disciples and to us, you do not have to be afraid. He knew that he would be betrayed by a kiss from his friend Judas. He knew that he would be spat upon by the same people who welcomed him as a champion. He knew that the scribes and the church leaders would slap him and abuse him and would cry out for his execution. He knew all of this, even as he reached down and touched Peter, James, and John and said with compassion, "Rise, have no fear." God is still inviting us into that mysterious relationship, for his perfect love overcomes our fears.

So may it be today and always. Amen.