

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from February 27, 2022



This is the end of Epiphany, the season that Jesus is revealed to the world as the divine Son of God. The season climaxes with Transfiguration Sunday, where Jesus' true nature is revealed probably more thoroughly than any other event prior to his resurrection. Please join in a Transfiguration Sunday Affirmation.

Affirmation (P - Pastor; C - Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God the Father?

C: We believe in the God of glory, whose grandeur and glory are beyond our knowing: the creator of all life's richness, bounty and variety.

L: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

C: We believe in Jesus, the Image of the invisible God: he shows us the glory of the Father, and the love with which everything is made: he is the resurrection and the life eternal, the light of the world, always shining in the darkness.

L: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: We believe in the Holy Spirit of God, the breath of life who renews and transforms; who startles us with glimpses of glory; who inspires our seeking and searching -- to listen deeply for the voice of Christ teaching us and calling us to be the church, whose mission sharing in the journey to know, to love, and to serve God; making visible to all God's love, justice and gracious forgiveness. Amen.

(Blended and adapted from Rev. Dr. Anne Morris, the HUMC mission statement, and the PCUSA Study Catechism.)

Opening Prayer Loving God, we have gathered today to give and give of ourselves in worship to you. Receive our gifts as an expression of our love and commitment to you. Grace us that we may hear what you would speak to us this day. For your word is always living and active, a message of life and hope to a church and world that needs to see Jesus afresh, and it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Call to Worship

Lay Reader: God is calling through the voices of our neighbors' urgent prayers, through their longing for redemption and for rescue from despair. Place of hurt or face of needing; strident cry or silent pleading: God is calling - can you hear? ... God is calling through the whisper of the Spirit's deepest sighs, through the thrill of sudden beauties that can catch us by surprise. Flash of lightening, crash of thunder; hush of stillness, rush of wonder: God is calling - come and hear...

(From "God is Calling through the Whisper" by W Zlobie Lezy)

God calls us to grow close to him because with all of the challenges of this life that we need to navigate, it is important that our goal is to more deeply grasp who Jesus is... One way is by seeing him in nature all around us. Let's sing "For the Beauty"

Music (vv 1,2,3,6) For the Beauty of the Earth

If we are open to it, there is a joy-inspiring thrill about the grandeur of nature, and another way we draw closer is by listening to him speak peace to us in our hearts. Let's sing...

Music (vv 1,2,3,4) There's Within My Heart

Theme Of course the heart feels more than melodies and whispers of peace -- even the song hints at it -- sometimes there are trials and strife that find their way to surface, and we are challenged to give in to the fear. Aesop, Native Americans, and other international folk lore all have some version of this particular story.

Once upon a time there was a war between the birds and the beasts. Bats began on the birds' side, but the first battle was going to the beasts. When the bats saw what was happening, they hid away. When the victorious beasts returned home, the bats slipped in among them. Eventually, some noticed and said, "Wait a minute, you are one of the ones who fought against us!"

The bats replied, "Oh no, we are with you. We don't belong to the birds, look -- ears, claws, and fangs -- have you ever seen a bird like that? No, we are one of the beasts." The beasts said nothing more and let them be among them.

It wasn't long before the next battle brewed. This time the birds got the upper hand. When the bats saw what was happening, they went and hid away. When the victorious birds returned home, the bats slipped in among them. Eventually, some noticed them and said, "Wait a minute, you are one of the ones who fought against us!"

The bats replied, "Oh no, we are with you. Have you ever seen a beast with

wings?" No, we are one of the birds." The birds said nothing more and let them be among them.

Battle after battle the bats hid and then went home with the victor. Eventually, the birds and beasts got tired of fighting and met to make peace. As they were deciding who could live where, the beasts told the bats, "You fought with the birds, go live with them."

The birds told the bats, "You fought with the beasts, go live with them."

The bats had nowhere to go and were thus cast out -- without friends that walked the earth or perched in the treetops, cursed to live in black caves, sneaking around and flying alone in the dark of night.

(Ad. from "Bat" in *The Moral Compass: Stories for Life's Journey*, ed. with commentary by William J. Bennett.)

They were afraid to commit. Fear and uncertainty can easily paralyze us from choosing our commitments to our current loyalties and future paths. In a fiction television drama, an ex-soldier who was now a traveling outcast after the loss of the war -- is confronted by a current officer of the powerful victorious society. The officer referenced the key turning point battle in the war and described it as "a battle you were on the wrong side of." To which the ex-soldier replied, "May have been the losing side, still not convinced it was the wrong one." (*Firefly 1:2 Bushwacked*). There is a difference.

As Epiphany ends and the challenges of Lent begin -- that is -- when the challenges to Jesus and his followers begin to mount as the move into the time of criticism and opposition leading to crucifixion. At times, in the moment, it could become foggy about which side might be winning. Therefore, it was important the disciples could see clearly who they were siding with and where the full path would ultimately lead. We'll here more on that later. It wasn't just true when Jesus was heading to the cross. God's people needed a clear vision in all their difficult times. In the times of Moses, and times of Paul and the New Testament Church too. They tell us that if we are going to be faithful, we must clearly see who it is we are serving.

Responsive Reading (L - Lay Reader, C - Congregation)

L: When Moses came back down from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the covenant law, he didn't realize that his face was radiant from being in the presence of God.

C: Aaron and the people were afraid to approach him.

L: But Moses called them to him. Aaron and all the community leaders came back, and Moses talked to them. After that, *all* the people came near.

C: Moses passed on to them all the commands the Lord have given him on the mountain.

L: When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever he entered the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle, he would remove the veil.

C: Then he would come out and tell the people what the Lord had ordered.

L: The people saw that his face was shining, so he covered his face with the veil until he went in to speak with God. Paul explains: There was glory in what worked to declare people guilty. How much more glory must abound in the work of the Spirit that makes people right with God! By comparison with this greater glory of the new covenant, the old covenant now has no glory.

C: If the old system that was full of heavenly glory faded away, how much more glory is there in the new covenant plan for our salvation which lasts forever.

L: Moses put a veil over his face to hide that the glorious brightness fades and comes to an end.

C: Not only was the face of Moses veiled, so too were the minds of the people veiled and blinded.

L: And this veil of misunderstanding continues today. It can be removed only by believing in Christ.

C: Whenever anyone turns from sin to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

L: The Lord is the Spirit who gives life, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

C: We have no veil over our faces. We can see and contemplate deeply on the Lord's glory.

L: and like mirrors, we brightly reflect the Lord's glory. The Holy Spirit transforms us – [transfigures us] into his image with ever-increasing glory.

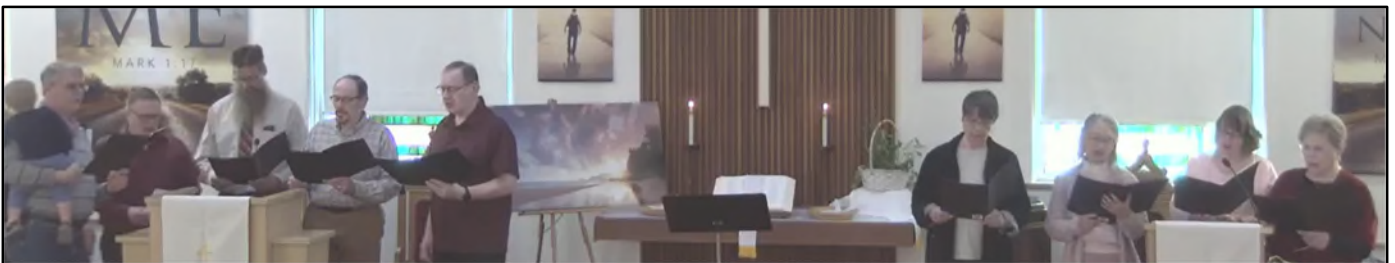
C: [Our lives] become [brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become] more and more like him.

(Taken from Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:9-18 NIV, TLB, NIRV, CJB, [MSG])

Paul says the blinders can be off, and later will take his closest disciples with him and they will *begin* to see him for who he really is. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing away the distractions that we can focus on him.

Prayer Music (2x) Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Prayers Our most powerful God, all the heavens proclaim your righteousness. During the rising of the sun to where it sets, from your beautiful heaven you call to everyone on earth. You come to us in the glory of nature and in the glory of Jesus who continues to gather his followers around you. You recognize our prayers and vows of worship that we seek to fulfill. You also remind us that you already have everything you need, for all the world belongs to you. There is nothing we can give you that you do not already own. What you want most of us is to choose you, to heed your instruction; and to not forget who you are when we are tempted to ignore your words and live against you and our neighbor. Remind us again who you are and what you have done for us, and what you are calling us to be as your people, At times, we have taken your silent graceful patience as approval for our misdeeds, wake us up and help us reconsider. Forgive us. Hear us when we call to you in days of trouble, and in the troubles of our neighbors. **Praises and Petitions** * We continue to pray for Jim Mallott * for Gar Lemon, * and for Julie Evans, * and we pray for Kathy Novak's friend Julie Wilkerson, who is recovering from a heart attack, * and for peace in the world particularly at this time, for the protection of women and children; for everything that is going on in the Ukraine, as well as other parts of the world -- we just ask that you would look over the leaders, guide them, whisper into their ears, and help them bring a quick resolution for peace. * We also pray for those who have not been named today except in our hearts and minds. Lord, the miraculous power of your Spirit has put love in our hearts to compassionately care for and meet the needs of others to the best of our ability. Receive us, our prayers, our talents, our time and energy, and what we have, as we offer ourselves to be instruments of your kingdom here on earth as you enable us to live as you taught us to pray **LORD'S PRAYER**



We now strive to “move up the mountain” with Jesus so we can be strengthened by a better understanding of who he is and what he wants to do for us in any circumstance....

Special Music (Seasonal Singers)

Higher Ground

I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day,
Still praying as I onward bound, "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Refrain

Lord, lift me up, and let me stand, by faith, on heaven's table land.
A higher plane than I have found. Lord plant my feet on higher ground.

My heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay
Tho' some may dwell where these abound, my prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

Refrain

I want to live above the world, tho' Satan's darts at me are hurled;
Fore faith has caught the joyful sound, the song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height, and catch a gleam of glory bright;
but still I'll pray till heav'n I've found, "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Refrain

CCLI # 2561297

Bible Reading Introduction

Jesus sent the disciples on a circuit of preaching the good news and healing. Their ministry went so well that it led to conjecture as to just who this was that could so empower his representatives. Meanwhile, the disciples returned and reported to Jesus. They tried to withdraw, but crowds followed. Jesus welcomed them, taught, and healed them, then miraculously fed this crowd of 5,000 plus with food left over.

Then he withdrew with the 12 disciples and asked them who the crowds, --- and who they, --- thought he was. They named what the people were saying, then Peter replied that they believed he was the God's Messiah -- the long-expected chosen king that would deliver the people. But they did not yet understand how he was going to save them. Jesus tells them that he will have to be rejected, suffer, die and be raised.

Peter pulls Jesus aside and argues against this plan. Jesus said that this is God's plan not only for him, but for all who would follow him* -- spiritually, if not literally. They, and we too, must pick up our cross daily, for it is in doing so that we find real life, and it is of no value to gain the whole world if we lose our life, lose ourselves in the process. Jesus then awaits an opportunity to help prepare them to stand



strong in the face of opposition that is about to be unleashed on them. He would do this by showing them more clearly who he really was. It happened

* We learn this part of the story from Mark

Bible Reading

About eight days later, Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. As he was praying, his face began to shine. His clothes became dazzling white and blazed as bright as a flash of lightning. Moses and Elijah appeared glorious splendor. They spoke about his [exodus], which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem, to be carried out in accordance with God's plan. Peter and his companions had been very sleepy, but then they became fully awake. They saw Jesus' brightness and glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, all confused and not knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, this is wonderful for us to be here! We'll put up three shelters -- one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah!" But even while he was speaking, a cloud formed and enveloped them, and terror gripped them as it covered them. A voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, and I have chosen him. Listen to him." As the voice died away, they found that Jesus was alone with his disciples. They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Luke 9:28-36 (NIV, TLB, NIRV)

Peter didn't really understand what he was saying, but he did understand that with Jesus, he was on holy ground, and the thought of being with him enthralled him, and it should us too, so let's sing...

Music Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee

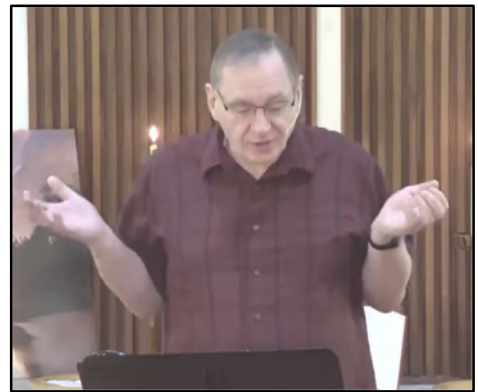
Sermon Called to See Jesus

That song expresses the kind of devotion and loyalty that Jesus is hoping to create as he takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray. They (or should I say "we") -- expect the warrior knight on the white horse galloping in and freeing us from whatever is our current dilemma. Right? [Yes.] We expect worldly victory -- for them it was over Roman oppression and all its consequences. For us, it may be economics, relationships, addictions, bad habits, war, mistakes we've made that have caught up with us and won't let go, and the list goes on and on and on -- fill in the blank of what it may be for you. We think our faith will deliver us the world (give us everything we want) -- or offer us escape from its problems; -- and it can be troubling to us when God doesn't seem to meet *our* expectations and

in our timetable. When we are tempted to feel that way, we are then tempted to pursue little, grow little, and settle for what we can do only in our own strength, because we don't think God is acting.

Jesus takes us up into the mountain to pray and clarify a few things. They were very drowsy, Luke says. It probably was not only physical tiredness, but also a spiritual slumber that was not awoken by the successful mission circuit, the miraculous feeding and Peter's proclamation of Jesus' role as God's chosen deliverer. No doubt that Jesus' words about bringing that salvation about by his arrest, trial, suffering, death and resurrection (whatever that meant), his confrontation with Peter's objections, and their own likely martyrdom was still weighing heavily on their minds as well, creating some spiritual drowsiness as well as physical. They didn't understand it all at that point. Confusion can lead to a lot of tiredness, can't it?

This is why this mountain vision was so important for these troubled disciples... if they (and we) can get a clearer vision of who God is and what he wants to do in and through us, rather than settling for what we can do on our own, our vision expands, our faith increases, and He will do greater things through us in wider circles... if that is what he is wanting to do. Making time and space for prayer and reflection is crucial if we are to become fully awake to who Jesus is, what he is about, and where we are going with him.



They envision Christ in all his divine glory along with Moses and Elijah, and they heard an intense discussion about Jesus' soon coming "departure", our reading used the literal translation: "exodus". The same word used in the Old Testament to describe the salvation event for the Jews... Now we have the salvation event for the Christian being explored (how it was going to come about). In the Old, the Red Sea opened to lead the people through to salvation and crashed back on their captors, sealing their deliverance from slavery. But this time it would not be any waters, but the body of Christ opened to spill the red river of his blood, his life... through which and by which we are sealed and delivered from slavery to sin.

When our spirits capture and trust in a vision; it changes how we live... it guides our decisions and inspires us to new heights. It is this part of the story from which we developed the phrase, "mountain top experience", right? And like Peter that is

how we want to live our whole life! The song the seasonal singers sang almost says that “I want to live above everything” It is our goal -- high on the mountain. The spiritual rush of overwhelming awe that washes away doubts and awakens us to who God is and that he has plans for us – and whatever our circumstances may be – they fade strangely dim in the awareness that God's presence is with us no matter what we are facing. It's a good thing.

No wonder Peter wanted to build booths. He wanted to make the moment last -- who wouldn't? We'd want to experience it over and over. Just as some plaster memories on Facebook, we carve out those special experiences that we have with God. And we should! What is the Bible but a recording of God's actions in his world so we can remember? It is the heavenly “Facebook page” – recording all the things God has done for us throughout history. His actions in the world are recounted so that we never forget who he is and what he is about, and how he works.

Then comes the voice -- "Listen to him". You'd think that was piling on, wouldn't you? You'd think they'd already experienced enough, but the voice has to add to the experience. It wasn't piling on. Having removed all doubt about the reality of the Messiah that that is who Jesus is -- God is now trying to make it clear that the plan for him that they find so confusing and troubling is indeed the God's plan -- they need to listen to what he is saying about what is going to happen to him – because they still didn't get it. They didn't understand it, they didn't believe it, they didn't want it -- *that way*. They got it when he filled their bellies and healed their sick and taught like no else, they got it when he confronted religious leaders about their hypocrisy, their play acting and attracted crowds... but as soon as the topic turned away from a glorious kingship conquering all oppression and personal struggles -- and it turned to selfless sacrifice – all of a sudden the tendency is for ears and eyes to begin closing and hearts begin hardening. Right? Because we don't want to hear that part of the story.

We need to reawaken and maintain a glimpse of God's glory. But how do we that? For that, let's turn to the Old Testament event and Paul's commentary on it that we heard in the responsive reading.

It was during the Exodus that the Israelites traveled through the wilderness toward the promised land, and if you know that story it was a troublesome journey for them. Moses met with God on Mount Sinai and also in what they called a tent of meeting that they set up *outside* of wherever they set up camp. After these meetings, Moses' face radiated with God's glory. Can you imagine having such a

close connection with God that others can see it in your face -- in your life? Would that be “cool”?

Back then, it wasn't cool. Back then, the response to such a sign was fear. So much so that Moses used a veil to cover his face when he finished reporting God's instructions and was out among the people. Some say that the veil and the meeting place being *outside* the camp implied that there was still a barrier that remained between God and his rebellious people, but not between God and Moses, because he was God's chosen.

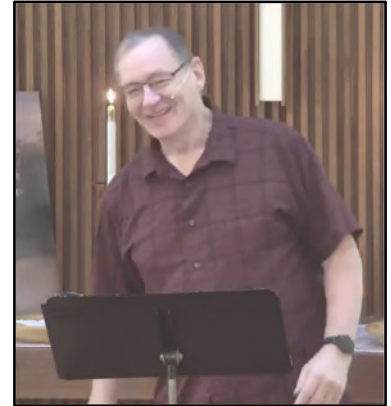


Paul expands on that imagery. Moses was equated with the first (Law) covenant between God and humanity. It was so glorious that people could not even look at Moses. Moses wore the veil, (according to Paul) not to hide God's radiant majesty, but to hide the fact that the splendor of that first formal, legal covenant connection -- was temporary and fades. In fact, it had no glory in comparison to the glory of the new covenant that Jesus establishes – a covenant that Paul says removes the veil (of sin) that covers our hearts and separates us from God. A covenant that is permanent, heart-motivated, Spirit-filled, a personal relationship that leads to right relationship and out of that – right living. Our hearts, faces, and lives are fully exposed to God's presence, and in this direct, unveiled connection, we contemplate what we see -- his glory -- who he is and what he has done. And this meditative exercise will transform us more and more into his image. Just like we gaze into the mirror each morning, the mirror reflects back to us what we are. And if we gaze into God's glory, it reflects back who he is, and then we mirror that to the world. We are God's mirror, reflected to the world. (See 2 Corinthians 3:18, James 1:22-25, 1 John 3:2)

And the key to reflecting God is contemplating, meditating on, or whatever word you want to use – *with* him. Contemplation is not a purely mental exercise. Now for someone like me who works primarily with his brain and not as much with the heart, this can be challenging for me. But I'll tell you what the Bible says, I think -- in my head -- and my heart will get there too.

Contemplation is not a purely mental exercise. There is certainly a time for study, for learning and understanding and application. That mental exercise is important. We love God with all of our heads, brains, minds, as well as our body, souls, spirit... And just as many people learn deeply about each other -- what they think, feel,

desire, how they respond and act, and out of that knowledge they grow a stronger relationship -- so we do know about each other right? But if that is *all* we ever do - if every time I sat down with you, and all I ever did was “study” you to see who you are and what you are like -- that would not be a real comfortable relationship would it? Relationship goes beyond studying each other. There is also a time for “heart connection” where you just experience each other and enjoy each other’s company. I don’t really know how to explain what that is, but I can kind of explain what it isn’t. So let me try and get at it from that perspective. You receive a love letter. What do you do with it? [Keep it]. Keep it, yes. Here is what a mental person like me does -- not to this degree, I’m exaggerating to make the point. You look at the grammar and over-analyze every word choice and turn of phrase looking for a deeper meaning. In the search for some deeper meaning, we fail to receive the sender’s intended expression of love. Right? [Awww.] Aww is right. This wasn’t supposed to be a funny part of the sermon. [We’re not surprised]... Not surprised, right, being a “teaching” pastor, I guess you get me...



American poet Billy Collins captures a similar frustration in how he introduces poetry [to students] and this is what he writes:

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,
or walk inside the poem’s room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author’s name on the shore.

[In other words, experience it -- just feel it]

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out *what it really means*. (emphasis added)

Introduction to Poetry by Billy Collins, poetryfoundation.org

It'd be like the first time your newborn wraps its tiny hand as far as it can reach around your pinky finger. We can analyze the skeletal and muscular structure and the instinctive reflexive grasping actions and all the science of it – is that what we do with our kids/grandkids when they grab that finger for the first time? Is that what you are thinking? Not usually, especially not at first. Most of us usually get caught up in the miraculous wonder of babyhood. A friendship is not built by psychoanalyzing the potential friend, but by enjoying the experience of being together, and we need to do that with God too.

But where do we experience and find God to enjoy his presence? Imagine a lake that freezes over. It is that

Where do we find God?

time of year when in some places, the ice is still thick in some spots and thinner in other spots, effectively separating the world of air breathers and the world of water breathers. Some places are thick, other places it is really thin. If we airbreathers step there, we might easily join in the water breathers, right? (Fall through the ice). In our context, thin places are where the border between heaven and earth, sacred and secular bleed together more easily. Where we break through -- God can break through to us, we can break through to God. And it isn't so much that God is here or there more than anywhere else, for he is everywhere, but thin places are those "holy ground" locations and/or activities where we are more readily aware of God's presence with us.

So, to the question is, "Where are those places, what are those activities?" Where do you find God?" the technical answer is found in Old McDonald's tune – it is always: ♪ here (he is), there (he is), everywhere (he is is)! How does that tune go? Old McDonald had a farm -- with a "God here, God there, God everywhere" But the question isn't seeking theological technicalities. It is asking us about thin spots, those places and ways that we more easily come to sense God's presence with us. For Moses, it was the tent, and on the mount, and with the burning bush. The answer may be different for everyone one of us – where do you find God? What activities, what places, what disciplines, what exercises create a "thin place" for you? Just a few examples:

There are many means and methods God may use to reach us. Bible reading, prayer, music, (we know all these answers,

In what we enjoy

right?) devotional books, fasting, good deeds, the list is not limited. One thing we may not think of is in connecting with God through those things that we just happen to enjoy in life -- they may not necessarily be religious in and of themselves. One pastor gave two examples of this: He was on a retreat once, and one lady was really struggling trying to find that ability to contemplate and meditate. But he also found out that this person loved doing jig saw puzzles, so he invited her to do a puzzle while she prayed, and it felt to her like God was right there enjoying the puzzle with her as she meditated -- or as she “puzzled” and she enjoyed the retreat. At another time, a man was too distracted to pray. But he loved looking at the architecture of the city in which he lived. The pastor invited him to pray while he did so. The man said that he would feel guilty doing that. The pastor replied, pray however you like, but the next time you observe buildings, ask God to go with you. It was the beginning of a new way of relating to God. Both of these people found what, *for them*, were thin places where God more easily broke into their awareness. When you do something you enjoy, invite God to do it with you. Just like you’d do with a friend. Look at it this way -- God may not be really excited about your activity, but he is interested in you. Just like Ben (my son) isn’t always interested in everything I do, but he does it anyway because we’ve got to be together. (He’s shrugging about that, but...) Friends enjoy doing things together because they want to be together. The activity is secondary to that being together; and hopefully the feeling is mutual.

If touring a museum is our “thing”, you can go alone and enjoy it, you can take friends and enjoy it, *and you can invite God to go with you and enjoy that* – each will have their own kind of enjoyment. I’d recommend that if you take God only with you, that you not necessarily talk to him out loud, but use your creative imagination to bring him into your awareness. Understand that he is there. It isn’t that we are pretending he is there – for he is – because he is everywhere – he is here, he is with us, wherever we are. So, what I am saying is to be intentional about being conscious of our awareness that he is with us – at all times and all places -- and then any place can become a thin place, where God breaks through to us and we break through to him.

The early church discovered they were reborn into a new way of being human, transformed into forgiven, forgiving, and **Church-Spirit** inclusive individuals and community that could only be explained by the action of God’s Spirit. So another way to get to know God better by associating with his

people, and that is why we are here today too. So we can be together and learn from each other. We don't only learn about each other by being with each other but also by being with each other's friends and the circle becomes closer as well.

We also get to know God and what he is like through his Son Jesus Christ. There is no better demonstration of God's values and likes and dislikes and nature than we find in this divine human. More than any other, Jesus is *the* place where heaven and earth meet... to meet Jesus is to meet with God. The more we get to know him through the gospels, the more we will know -- and appreciate -- God. As I hinted at earlier, while Bible study is important, perhaps study should not ALWAYS be the goal, but simply to be with God's letters that express his love and commitment to us, and us to him through the life of Jesus Christ, the early church, and even through the Old Testament people.

One of the ways we get to know our friends is by taking an interest in what they have done and do. What kind of projects do they throw Creation themselves into? So what has God thrown himself into? We sang it at the beginning of the service -- For the Beauty of the Earth -- all creation. So "nature -- ly", (naturally) for many people, one of the thin spots is out in the beauty of nature, admiring God's handiwork. Lately, the sun has been going down just as I drive Sara to work each night. And, unfortunately, I am driving *straight* into the sun, but even so, it is really hard not to admire what God does with the clouds and the sky and that big ball of gas that keeps us warm. I remember a - I'm going to call in ancient - an ancient Ziqqy cartoon -- do you remember Ziqqy? And he is watching a sunset, I believe, and he is there just giving a standing ovation -- for God's artwork -- every night created new.

A friend shows you her new piece of artistic pottery. You admire the craftsmanship of the pot, but you don't ignore the potter either, do you? You might if you are in a museum sometimes, but there is a person who did that piece and you appreciate the person and the skill, and if the person is there with you, you celebrate together the beauty of that creation.

Don't forget the Creator -- be consciously aware of him beside you as you are out enjoying his natural world, or in puzzles, or in architecture, or in whatever you experience throughout the day -- be aware that God is there, experiencing it with you -- enjoying what you enjoy, and also facing what you face.

Prayer Let's pray. Dear Lord, we hear and see things that are beyond our control to do anything about, except pray. The disciples were about to enter a journey they

could not understand, and it was beyond their ability to even know what was going to happen much less work their way through it. We've seen circumstances, sometimes our own circumstances, that seem beyond our ability to control, or handle. Yet you call us to shine with your glory revealing your glory to the world. You invite us into a greater awareness of your presence to remind us just who it is that we are putting our trust and seeking to follow faithfully. We've seen you at work in the Old Testament, we've seen you at work in the New Testament, we've seen you at work in Jesus, and in the church, in our own lives and the lives of others around us, and by it we take confidence that your Spirit can indeed descend on us and enable us to celebrate the joys and face the challenges of life that lay before us on any given day -- any given stage of life -- and to faithfully say and do what you have called us to be as we learn to recognize your presence with us and within us. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

The disciples received a very special revelation on the mountain, we probably won't receive that kind of a vision or revelation, but it doesn't mean the Spirit will not teach us the same lessons, in fact our hymnwriter says, we don't need that, we don't ask for that, but simply to take the blinders of our souls. Let's sing...

Music (vv 1,2,4,5) Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart

Blessing Now as you go, may you be strengthened, comforted, and inspired to live lives worthy of God, who calls you to see him for who he is and covenants with you to be with you always as you participate in his kingdom and family. Amen.