

**Mountain Moments**  
**Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday**  
**Matthew 17: 1-9**  
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Three years. In your life, how much have you been able to pack into any three years' time? I think about that periodically whenever I ponder Jesus' life, and, specifically, His public ministry of about three years. That time between His baptism, which we remembered just weeks ago, in January, and that time when He went to the cross. While our weeks, days and nights sometimes feel quite full indeed, Jesus' own world-transforming impact in three years, it's hard to fathom. Yet we know Jesus had plenty of moments in which He was alone, still, praying, listening to God. And once, He invited some friends along for a close encounter with divine glory.

The Transfiguration, this event that we just read and heard about from Matthew, is a strange account of Jesus transfigured in the presence of three of His disciples. And it doesn't last long. There are no good markers of time in Matthew's account. When you have moments of glory, or moments of extreme wonder or fear, time loses traction. Minutes can seem like hours, hours can flash by in an instant. Peter, James and John certainly remembered this mountaintop moment, for an account of the transfiguration appears not just in Matthew's gospel, but also in Luke and Mark, and 2 Peter.

Jesus shines in great light, dressed in dazzling white, and appears with Moses and Elijah--Moses, the one who had received the law of God through his own Divine Glory encounter on mount Sinai centuries before, and Elijah, the great prophet who was said to have been swept up into heaven by glorious chariots of fire. With them, Jesus dazzles before the disciples, and their feeble attempts at making order in the situation are met with the very voice of God: "This is my Son, my Beloved; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

Peter must have had that sense of time slipping, as he fumbles with some attempt at making sense of what he sees, capturing this moment, holding on, in the event that this is the new reality. But it is not to be. Jesus' transfiguration is over, like most mountain moments are, before Peter or James or John can begin to grasp the meaning of what they had just seen and experienced, let alone its meaning, its impact for all time. Surely reeling, they head back down the mountain with Jesus, back to myriad needs and a world begging for good news.

The recent devastation from the earthquake and aftershocks in Turkey and Syria has likely shaken all of us. Such enormous loss of life, harrowing stories of rescue and the great need for immediate shelter before even thinking about rebuilding efforts. It is sobering. We pray, we give, we are Church at work. Turkey's earthquake brought back

to my mind another great quake that left the country of Haiti shaken to the ground a little over a decade ago.

Some months after Haiti's earthquake in 2010 I traveled there with Living Waters for the World and, at that time, a new organization called Solar Under the Sun – an ecumenical partnership to bring solar power to those water systems. We were visiting partners and stayed in Cherident, a small town about 50 miles southwest of the capital, Port-au-Prince. Most townspeople in Cherident were subsistence farmers, so their only source of income was anything extra they might sell on the side of the road. Their three school buildings, one and only church, an Episcopal church, and almost all their homes were flattened in the earthquake that had occurred.

About 30 years ago before, some Arkansas Presbyterians started a relationship partnership with the community of Cherident, and they were heartbroken alongside them when they heard the news that the school buildings they had helped construct were no more. And yet, as we pulled up to the church property gate, it was clear that school was still in session. Among the ruins of the sanctuary, community members had put up corrugated metal roof sections, and had tied tarps to remaining rebar, as temporary walls. They'd fixed broken furniture and divided classrooms with movable blackboards. Six classes were meeting at one time on the foundation of the sanctuary. Children in mustard-colored uniforms stood in greeting as we entered each section, ready to learn and move on with their education. Teachers gave permission for them to sit and answer our questions. While many children had mastered Haitian Creole, French, English and Spanish, most had had only one meal that day to fuel their studies and physical growth. The church had taken in as many orphans as it could in the area, but they were living in tents and temporary shelter, so were the orphans. But these were the lucky children, compared to those living in the vast tent cities of Port-au-Prince.

We spent a week with our hosts in Cherident, learning from them, meeting their families and friends, and praying with them after daytime trips to surrounding Living Waters and Solar projects. The priest who was hosting us – Pere Desiré - gave us his temporary shelter, and he moved back into a tent for the week. The days sped by, until it was Sunday. That day, Father Desire emerged from his tent in the back of the camp in his white robe and green stole. And three liturgists appeared, robed, and gave us a nod to follow them into worship. And we went back into the ruins of the sanctuary, which had been the makeshift classrooms all week long. But on Sunday morning, the cracked concrete slab in front was covered with a pressed cloth, and burning candles and sacramental bread and wine were set on this communion table, and flowers and streamers were hung from the rebar, and young people filled one section to the right with cherished instruments, and a full choir filled the section to the left, and the blackboards had been removed for the seating of the congregation, who sat in school chairs and benches, filling in all the way from the front to standing in the back. And the remains of their church's walls and the foundation were transfigured into a complete house of worship, to the glory of God. It became a beautiful, joyful, tear and laughter-filled place where we sang, read the Word of God, shared the Lord's Supper, and gave thanks to God. They even gave us some open mic time, and a stoic man on the team from

Tennessee was moved to tears and had to grab the microphone to thank the community for the love he felt among them.

Worship there wasn't long enough. It didn't last. After all, it was an Episcopalian service. The service was over in one hour and before we realized, the chairs went back to households and candlesticks and flowers were whisked away. But it was a realization that Christ was indeed their firm foundation, and something special happened for them every week on Sundays that gave them energy, imagination, and hope for the other six days ahead.

Of the few buildings left standing in Cherident, the only public building unaffected by the earthquake was the clinic. The clinic was staffed by a doctor who is there four days a week, coming in from the city. He was deeply committed to the people of Cherident, and maintaining a basic level of health care among them. In the back of the clinic, Living Waters for the World had installed a water treatment system. Our Haitian partners checked the system after the earthquake, got it back online, and it was one of many clean water systems in Haiti that pumped clean water 24 hours a day, seven days a week, since the earthquake. The doctor at the clinic told us he had seen only one case of Cholera in all of Cherident, and he credited this lack of disease directly to their clean water availability. That system, in that tiny village, made a difference for the 700 children in school there, and for the surrounding community's health and recovery.

Gerald Manley Hopkins, poet, once said so well, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."<sup>1</sup> The journey of Lent begins this week. May those mountaintop moments give you courage and hope, may those glimpses of glory that you have in scripture and in your own lives guide you as we journey with Christ into the sorrow and pain and promise of the cross. For we know that glory has gone before it, and glory shines through the shadows of Lent and Christ's passion and another mountain yet to come. Witnesses have gone before us, Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John, and so many others who witnessed with their lives, too, that God is more powerful than anything else that seeks to overtake us, even earthquakes, even corrupt governments, even disease, even death itself. So we travel through this coming season. May we be prepared to see that morning star rising, shining, be prepared to be witnesses to those mountain moments, and all the moments in between, for Christ is with us. That can transfigure anything. Everything. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> "God's Grandeur" [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)