

**2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9**

**Last Sunday after the Epiphany B; 02.11.24; G. Miles Smith+**

This morning I want to talk about how we, seeking to be Christian—or at least *experimenting* with being Christian—inevitably will live in the midst of some uncomfortable moments. We will inevitably find ourselves somewhere between *awe before God--and confusion...recognition of God--and incomprehension*. And living in those uncomfortable moments *in between* can sometimes be frustrating and discouraging...but they can also motivate us to go deeper in our understanding of and relationship with God. This can happen in so many ways in our lives. And it can happen almost every time we read the Bible.

*When we read and listen to scripture being read, we can quickly find ourselves somewhere within the spectrum...of awe and confusion ...recognition and incomprehension*. In the Old Testament story today, there is the story of the ascension of the prophet Elijah into heaven...by a whirlwind...amid a “chariot of fire and horses of fire”. *In the story, the other prophets were in awe and could recognize that Elijah was soon to be with God.*

And in the Gospel reading there is the story of Jesus on a high mountain ...suddenly transfigured in dazzling light...with Elijah and Moses appearing from heaven...a voice from God in an overshadowing cloud...and just as suddenly, everything disappearing...leaving Jesus and the three disciples looking at each other. *In this story, Peter, James, and John were confused and did not understand.*

So we see the spectrum of possible responses *within* these two stories. *And then the stories themselves leave us to find our own place within the spectrum of response: When you hear these stories, do you experience awe...or confusion? Recognition...or incomprehension?*

Every week, as the scripture readings change, I too have to find again where *I am* on the spectrum of response--before I can begin to imagine how to talk to you. | So, with the Elijah story, I'm reminded of a dear deceased parishioner from a previous church who was a recognized UAP (UFO) researcher--and this story was read at his funeral that I officiated. He believed that the “chariot of fire” was likely a UAP which carried Elijah away. I think this parishioner did a lot of valuable research--which I still have--but I don't think that is what *this* story is about. But I do still have to ask myself: Is it possible that in some way this story could have actually happened? Or is this another mythological story that an Old Testament writer told in order, in this case, to emphasize the truth and importance of Elijah? I do not want to be too quick to say what God *cannot* do—because apparently these days it is more generally assumed that God cannot do anything *unless we can explain it*. But I do believe that this *is* mythological story about Elijah—and it definitely succeeds in making it hard to forget him!

And so, there is Elijah again, appearing suddenly in the Jesus story, along with Moses. And this story of Jesus' transfiguration is a story which I return to over and over again. I still find myself, repeatedly, all over the spectrum of *awe and confusion, recognition and incomprehension*. And I always ask myself again: Did this really happen? And because it so explicitly parallels the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, and the presence of Moses and Elijah in the story can so neatly represent that Jesus is on good terms with both the law and the prophets, I am comfortable with imagining the possibility that this did *not* really happen *as such* but it is a story that is about the *truth* of Jesus. But--I am also challenged to imagine that there could be here a core experience of the disciples...of some transcendental moment with Jesus...that even involved dazzling light...that left the disciples in confusion and incomprehension *but was nevertheless something they could never forget*. And I am increasingly sympathetic to the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who said, and I paraphrase to make my point: “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy and science.”

And so, the transfiguration of Jesus is indeed a story that moves me every time...to make my own journey again from confusion—to awe...and from incomprehension—to recognition. I glimpse again, in the midst of the humanity of Jesus' story, the participation of Jesus within the divine. And while I can just as easily say something foolish like Peter in response...I still cannot forget my own transcendental experiences of Jesus...and that I too am claimed by the voice from the overshadowing cloud: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”