

## “Upon Reflection”

Matthew 17:1-9  
Richard C. Allen  
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South Glastonbury  
Connecticut

The story of the Transfiguration takes us into the realm of the mystical. Seeing Elijah and Moses and Jesus huddled in the clouds is stunning to the disciples. They hardly know what to make of it, much less understand the significance of it. They are like children who have witnessed something so far beyond their daily life experience that they don't have a clue as to how to even talk about it. When the mystical moment passes and the small group heads back down the mountain, Jesus does them a huge favor. He tells them in effect, 'don't even think of trying to make sense of what you've just witnessed until after I have been raised from the dead. Upon reflection, what you have witnessed here will begin to make sense.'

Upon reflection . . . this is how we typically find meaning as the sacred events in our lives unfold; not so much in the moment itself, but later, upon reflection. Sometimes the moment itself is either too mundane or too intense, either too ordinary or too dramatic to appreciate what's happening. It's often hours or days or even years later that we reflect on an event and discern its meaning, seeing the presence of God in it, as if for the first time.

Peter, James, and John had come to know Jesus as a good teacher, a terrific role model, an advocate for justice, a healer, and a compassionate presence. But on that Day of Transfiguration, up on that mountain top, they witnessed more than his extraordinary humanity; they witnessed his divinity. Holding hands with Moses and Elijah, the transfigured Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

As the vision of those three spiritual giants fades into the sunset, the three disciples are left standing there like townspeople in the old radio series, *The Lone Ranger*, wondering, ‘who is that masked man?’ Peter, James and John are left wondering, ‘who is this teacher of ours?’ In the closing moments of each of those radio dramas, someone in the crowd would cry out, “That’s the Lone Ranger.’ Up on the mountain that day, a voice from heaven cries out, “This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am pleased.”

Peter, James, and John take all this in, but they can’t grasp the meaning of it. It’s only later, upon reflection, after Easter, after the Resurrection, after the empty tomb, after he appears to them in a resurrected body that they begin to get the picture, that they begin to put all of the pieces of the puzzle together.

It’s upon reflection that they see what they had not seen, that they understand what they had not understood, that God had actually come and shared their common lot, that God had actually become a human being, that God had become vulnerable in order to demonstrate the power of love.

Returning home from the Peace Corps in 1971, I remember telling people in great generalities how the two years had been the best job I’d ever had, how it had changed my life, how it had opened my eyes to so many things. No one pressed me too hard on the specifics and neither did I press myself on the specifics of what it all had meant. I quickly moved on to seminary and to a career in ministry and to raising a family. Twenty-three years later, there was this inner voice calling me to return to my Peace Corps school and the villages that surrounded it. I didn’t know what to make of that still, small voice, but I bought a plane ticket and I flew to Malawi. On my first Sunday back in the village, I decided to attend the local Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, a denomination that been founded by Dr. David Livingstone.

I sneaked in and sat in the back row where I imagined I could be inconspicuous. Ha! Impossible! A deacon indentified me, found out who I was, and led me to the pastor's study. After a five minute conversation, the pastor informed me I'd be delivering the sermon. I protested, saying I was not prepared. He countered saying a preacher is always prepared. So, there I was, in the pulpit facing 600 people without as much as an outline. And as I looked upon those 600 faces, I knew what I needed to say, for upon reflection I had begun to see what those years in the Peace Corps had really meant to me, in specifics.

Upon reflection, I saw clearly that God sometimes works through our weaknesses, through our failures; that God sometimes takes what we under-value and values that the most. Upon reflection, I saw clearly that God has extraordinary ways to get our attention in order to teach us what really matters in life. I went there with a college degree, one of five people within fifty miles to achieve that level of education, but I told those 600 people in the church that day that they had been my best professors, my most sensational teachers, because they had taught me what it means to have a generous heart, what it means to have patience, what it means to live between the land and God. I was too young to see all this at the time, at age 23, but upon reflection, two and half decades later, I saw it so clearly. Seeds planted there in the warm heart of Africa sprouted elsewhere. I didn't understand how God was working in my life at that time, in 1969 and 1970 and 1971, but on reflection I saw that God had been preparing me all along for a ministry of compassion. So I thanked those 600 people for having been my teachers.

When the Spirit of God breaks into our lives, we often don't recognize it for what it is. We call it a coincidence or we say it was a serendipitous moment or we say we got the goose bumps.

It's usually upon reflection that we see the hand of God upon our decisions; upon reflection that we see the presence of God in dreams; upon reflection that we see the Spirit of God in our relationships. As you can tell, I am big on this notion of reflecting on our life experiences and discovering in those experiences the unmistakable thumb prints of God. This is one way to honor the journey through Lent; to carve out time each week for reflecting on those events which at the time seemed mundane, but upon reflection become sacred. In the greatest of hope, Amen!