



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Last Sunday in Epiphany
February 19, 2023**

[RCL] Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Exodus 24:12-18

In Exodus 24, God calls Moses up the mountain in order to deliver to Moses “the tablets of stone, with the law and commandment, which I have written for [the Israelites] instruction.” The Torah is a gift from God, a covenant into which God desires to draw God’s people. It is an intimate teaching of right relationship with God and with one another. But this transmission of teaching from God to Moses is not a rote lecture with a PowerPoint and spreadsheets. It is a drawing into mystery, an encounter with the unspeakable and unknowable glory of God. It is an encounter that utterly transforms Moses. Here we see that God’s beauty and transcendence, and our invitation into God’s Being, go hand in hand with God’s very close interest in how we treat one another on this earth. It is, in fact, in enacting God’s desire for our relationships with one another that we can be swept up into God’s awe-inspiring and transformative presence.

- When has being in right relationship with others drawn me into the presence of God?
- When have I seen the interaction of justice and transcendence in my life?

Psalm 99

“Let the people tremble...” “Let the earth shake...” “Fall down before his footstool...” Psalm 99 is a psalm about worship, but it is a worship that is unsettling and destabilizing. This passage reminds us that encounters with God can upset the tidy categories into which the world arranges itself.

God’s presence is unsettling because it is re-ordering. God loves justice, establishes equity, and desires the unsettling of unjust power. The psalmist sees this aspect of God as worthy to be praised, as evidence of God’s holiness.

God’s presence is mystery, but it is not chaos. God speaks from “out of the pillar of cloud” to those who call upon God’s name. Even in God’s unsettling mystery, God wants to make Godself known to us.

- When have I been unsettled by God’s Word or God’s beauty?
- How is God trying to make Godself known to me?

2 Peter 1:16-21

Second Peter is said by tradition to have been written by Peter the Apostle (though most modern scholars now doubt that St. Peter actually penned this letter himself). In the first chapter of this letter, the author is reminding the readers of Peter’s witness to the Transfiguration, described in today’s Gospel passage. I wonder about that event that Peter was able to witness as a young man and wonder how many times he

Published by the Office of Communication of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

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returned to it in his memory during the hardships and doubts of his life. Verse 19 advises, “You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” The memory of the Transfiguration, and the witness of Scripture in general, is offered to all those who have heard or read it, including us. We can use it to illuminate what we can in the cavernous dark room of fear in today’s world, knowing the promise not only that the day will dawn and light will surround us but also that the morning star will rise in our hearts and blaze within us.

- Where can I allow the witness of the glory of God to give me hope?
- What could I see differently if I held it up to the light of God’s glory?

Matthew 17:1-9

On this Transfiguration Sunday, the Gospel passage is indeed about the Transfiguration, the disciples’ vision of Jesus’ shining form, and the Father’s words about him. Peter, James, and John, after seeing Jesus’ stunning, luminous appearance, and seeing him speak with Moses and Elijah, hear these words: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” The spare and economic use of the voice of the Father in the New Testament lends emphasis when we do hear it, and centers on Jesus’ belovedness. It is his belovedness that gives him authority, and it is his belovedness by the Father that he has come to share with all of humanity.

With dazzling changes in Jesus’ appearance and a cloud filled with light that can somehow overshadow everything, the voice of the Almighty God fills the air, speaking of Jesus’ divine authority: “Listen to him.” Immediately, Jesus gives Peter, James, and John an opportunity to heed the Father’s words; he gives a command: “Get up and do not be afraid.”

- How does God proclaim my belovedness?
- When have I heard Jesus say, “Get up and do not be afraid”?

This Bible study was written by Sarah Faehnle Mast, a seminarian at the Seminary of the Southwest.