**Last Sunday after Epiphany, March 2, 2014, Ex 24: 12-18; Ps 99; 2 Peter 1: 16-21; Matt 17:1-9, Rev. Mary Trainor**

It was a real privilege for me to camp there for two nights, deep in Denali (Mt McKinley) National Park in Alaska. This was 34 years ago, when you could still drive to the small tent-only Wonder Lake campground 85 miles in. There were not many trees; our tent was set up in a hilly area above the boggy area that led climbers to the base of the big mountain. Throughout my stay there, whether I was hiking or cooking or putting up the tent, it seemed like all I could do was one thing: look at the mountain. My eyes were constantly riveted towards the mountain range before me; although the tops of the mountains were shrouded with clouds the majesty of the mountain was still overwhelming. My relative smallness and its beauty filled me. There were no experts or rangers around, just a few campers - and we all assumed we were looking at THE MOUNTAIN (which is 20,322' high). Then at dawn on the day we were to leave we looked out of our tent to see a sight that I will never forget: the clouds were gone, and way way way above the place where I had been looking stood Denali. It turned out that for the past two days all I had been looking at small neighboring mountains. Denali was easily twice as high as the mountains below it. What had been hidden by clouds was now revealed....and I had not even known that there was anything greater under those clouds! A shock, a surprise beyond my wildest imagination!

In the Bible, we see mountains and clouds mentioned many times: Mountains symbolize God's power and clouds symbolize God's activity or presence. In today's reading from Exodus we see Moses up on a mountain, Mount Sinai (7300' high). We read, "***the cloud covered the mountain...for six days; on the seventh day he (God) called to Moses out of the cloud***...***the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire***." A shock, a surprise beyond their wildest imagination! In today's Gospel reading, we heard "***a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.***" A shock, a surprise beyond Peter, James, and John's wildest imaginations! In the Epistle reading, we hear Peter reflecting back on the awesomeness of this day years later. Peter's life changed that day up on the mountain with Jesus, for he was an "***eyewitness of his majesty***." Peter woke up to the reality of Jesus' identity. From this day forward, Peter 's mission to share this Good News was jet propelled because of this experience, because of what he saw.

Today is called **Transfiguration Sunday** and today in the Episcopal church it is "**World Mission Sunday**." The term “Transfiguration” refers to the physical transformation that Jesus went through on top of that mountain – from being a regular human who had just climbed with His friends up this steep trail, to shining with amazing bright rays of light. These relate to each other, for experiencing God like Moses and Peter, James and John did jet propelled them to serve. We too are witnesses to the glory of God; this does not require a mountain, nor is it quite as dramatic -- but it is real. God's glory is all around us: in the face of a baby, in making pancakes side-by-side, in the beauty of the Wisconsin woods and rivers, in coincidences, in the Eucharist, in hearing God's Word, in prayer, in our music here, in our caring for one another, in our cinnamon rolls.

So, if we are able to experience God's glory too, why is it that we don't live accordingly? Hmmmm. Isn't it because we go through our lives like I went through my early time at Wonder Lake Campground in Denali National Park? We think we are experiencing all that there is to see, we think we get it, we think we understand. We take great pride in having all the answers about everything; this gives us a sense of control, of confidence, of security. Because we live this way, we can miss the majesty, the awe, the surprises that God is revealing right in front of us....and we don't even realize it! Had I left the foothills of Denali Mountain after one day, I would have left thinking I had seen the great mountain -- and I would have been so missed out on so much.

The word "mission" means to be sent -- but oh, we don't consider ourselves as missionaries. Missionaries, to us, are people who are sent to far off places to live in squalor for a time to share the Gospel; that is not us. Or is it? Yes, it is. We are all missionaries. In our Baptismal covenant we said we would: "**proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ....and seek and serve Christ in all persons"** (BCP p.305). Being called to do mission work is something that God can expect of us at the most unexpected times.

When I was in Colorado a couple of weeks ago, I talked with a woman who told me a story of a friend of hers who had experienced a personal tragedy. She told me how she cries with this friend each time they meet, because of the sadness. She cried telling me about it. The sadness overwhelmed her. After listening for a while, I shared with her about the reality of God's compassionate presence in the midst of tragic situations. She responded, "I wish I had faith too." I then told her about how I know about the reality of God/Jesus in our lives because I have experienced the real presence of Jesus. She looked longingly at me, but then seemed to hit a mental barrier. What I learned is that this woman is convinced that she cannot live a life of faith; her expectations of life and her identity do not include a life of faith in Jesus Christ. So she stays where she is; she is living in the foothills of Denali Mountain and is not seeing the glory of God before her -- her brain does not allow her to be open to the manifestation of God in her life. She is not unique; there are persons all around us who are like this: maybe you are like this too: not open to God's presence in their lives.

God's plan for us is to experience His goodness, His Light, His love, His grace right here on earth. Live anticipating, looking for God's glory. And when you experience it, stop and revel in it, giving thanks to God for this gift. And then, and through this experience, allow God to strengthen us for mission.

Let us pray today's Collect, which captures this message, together: **O God, who before the passion of your only­ begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**