



This may not be the smartest thing to admit out loud, but for the longest time this Transfiguration story, as we call it, was one of my least favorites in all of Scripture. And maybe it was simply out of envy or jealousy that I didn't think I ever had a mountaintop experience with God, and seemingly so many others did: as if they felt that God had directly appeared or spoke to them to go this way or that way on this terrain of life. That was nice for them, but I never quite had that level of an encounter with the Divine. It was as if my faith journey was relegated to the depths of the valley below, instead.

Now, growing up one of the best things we teenagers could do to experience some level of emotional or mental high was driving a half-hour away from our smaller farming community to the nearest full-scale movie theater, releasing the latest and greatest from the Hollywood end of things, that specialized in attempting to put audiences at the edge of their seat, trying to give some sense of a mountain-top experience with acting or screen-writing or orchestral soundtracks or digital interplays. And as I was still going through the valley of a faith journey, a faith that I still wasn't diving into all that much, and while I was still trying to figure out what route to take in the life terrain without any direct recommendation from the Almighty; there was this one film that didn't quite reach the mountaintop of the box office. It was by no means the best acting for Jim Carrey or Morgan Freeman or Jennifer Aniston. There was no gripping musical score or eye-catching digital quality, but there was just enough Gospel-like writing for the people in the valley portion of faith. *Bruce Almighty* was not the most beloved for the entire Christian church by any stretch of the imagination, but just enough to consider that maybe the best part of the Transfiguration story is the end of it all.

But the long and the short of the movie production is that Bruce hits a rough patch in his life: loses his job and then his relationship is on the outs. Of course, Bruce unleashes his frustration on God to the point that Bruce is thoroughly convinced that he could do the divine job better than the Almighty One. So, God caves in and gives Bruce the job of the Holy One. And when Bruce gets overwhelmed with the prayers flooding in from all over the world, he stops by a restaurant and gets a bowl of soup, which, in turn he decides to have some fun with his new powers and attempts to do his own parting of the Red Sea on the table in front of him. And then, God returns.

And leave it to Morgan Freeman in a most soothing reassuring voice to say, "Parting your soup is not a miracle, Bruce. It's a magic trick. A single mom who's working two jobs and still finds time to take her child to soccer practice, that's a miracle. A teenager who says 'no' to drugs and 'yes' to an education, that's a miracle. People want me to do everything for them. But what they don't realize is they have the power. You want to see a miracle, son? Be the miracle." Incredibly cliché, overly-simplistic, to be sure, but just enough for the people who wonder if any God traverses the valley of faith, and seriously consider if only miracles can happen on the mountaintop.

For the longest time, I was not a fan of the Transfiguration story, but every time I overlooked the ending, which I think is the best part of all. Not only does Jesus come down to the valley to finish the work of love for all humanity; not only does Jesus come down, but he calls the disciples who swing and miss on the mountaintop experience, who take questionable routes amidst life's whole terrain, who misread the very world-saving ministry of Jesus Christ over and over again; and yet the Lord calls them down to join in bringing the miracles to life down in the valley, down in the depths where God loves the world just as much as any mountaintop.

Except, preparations are well under-way by the entire wider church for the mountaintop-like experience we will gather for in seven weeks from today. Sanctuaries will be filled. Organ pipes will be

maxed out. And the best material the church has to work with will be proclaimed with all we have to give. We will boldly shout “Christ is Risen, indeed,” yet again, with the utmost conviction; as well we should.

But I hope these next forty-plus days are not taken for granted: a time for us to, in a sense, not only dwell in the valley, but to believe that God dwells there, too. To believe that the very power of life over death can thrive down there, too. And to believe that all people who wonder if their story is not good enough, no where near the others who are blessed with the mountaintop experience; that there is just as much God in their story, too. And that even the disciples who misread all the signs and wonders of God are still called to be part of the very ministry that is still saving the world with a love that not even sin and death stand a chance against. So, for all your stories of God dwelling within your life through all the peaks and valleys, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!