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Transfiguration– February 11, 2024

“Surprised on the Mountaintop”

Read: Mark 9: 2 – 13; Memorize: Mark 9: 2

Have you ever wanted to wander the roads and just find interesting people and places? I lived that dream virtually through a man named Charles Kuralt. He worked for CBS News and was the host of a show called *On the Road with Charles Kuralt*. He brought stories of the backroads of America and the interesting people who inhabited them to life on TV.

On one of his many travels across the United States, Kuralt unexpectedly spent the night on Mt. McKinley, now called Denali in Alaska. He had planned a day visit, but the plane that carried him to the glacier was unable to bring him back. Since it was getting late, he and his photographer would have to spend the night. Kuralt admits that a feeling of fear swept over him in that strange deserted place.

The pilot told him that there was a cabin not too far away. They would be able to spend the night there; then left. The men hiked for nearly an hour before they found the simple cabin. It was small, six sided and half buried in snow. What seemed strange to Kuralt when he arrived were the large windows. After eating stew, the men were ready for bed.

Then they looked out those same windows. They were taken by surprise by what they saw. They had the best seats on the planet for nature’s most spectacular show, the Northern Lights. They watched all night in wonder. They wondered if the pilot had set them up because he had sized them up as two guys who were in too big a hurry and would benefit from a night to slow down and think about the place where they were. Kuralt never forgot the night

Apparently the disciples needed just such a time. Jesus had recently told them about His coming suffering and death. They were shocked, surprised and confused. This wasn’t their plan the day they decided to drop everything and follow Jesus. They were ready to go up the mountain with Him. Perhaps in the rarified air minds would clear.

There was no way the disciples could have prepared for what took place. They saw Jesus changed. The disciples knew He was special, but they had never experienced anything like this.

If Jesus appear brightly wasn't enough, they saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Representing the Law and the Prophets. Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a chariot, Moses had been buried on a mountain. They were the sources of authority in Jewish life.

Here's the point of this sermon: there are times when God suddenly breaks into our lives to set us on His path. The confused disciples were given a preview of what was to come. They saw an amazing sight, a combination of human earth, time and eternity. The only thing Peter could say was, "Rabbi, it was good for us to be here." You don't get many such experiences in life.

William Boggs' grandfather played a very important role in his life. Grandpa Boggs had been blind for nearly twenty years. Grandpa would tell you quickly that the way the world was going he didn't much care to see it anyway but he did have one regret. He had never seen his grandson.

Sensing death closing in on him, William's grandfather prayed more intensely for the Lord to give him sight, just long enough to see his grandson before he died. The doctors told him it was impossible because of his illness.

But one day, grandpa was playing with his grandson when suddenly he could see. The whole family gathered to see what the fuss was about when it became apparent that his vision had returned. Grandpa picked up his grandson, whose face he had never seen, stared at him with an intensity that frightened the child.

William remembers him holding his face while both of them cried. Then in the most frightening moment of all, grandpa saw something to William. It was an unbelievable, once-in-a-lifetime experience. Grandpa looked his grandson in the eyes and softly said, "a preacher." That was all he said. Just those two words, quietly uttered with a tone of surprise.

Thirty years later William wonders which was the greater miracle, "that he could see or that he could see something so deeply hidden in William's distant future. William

believed that his grandfather's voice that day was the voice of God, breaking into his life. At such times, our perspective is changed.

On the mountaintop Jesus' disciples' perspective was changed also. Peter wanted to make some dwellings for them to stay up there on the mountaintop. It was an awesome place to be and Peter was both frightened and inspired by what he saw. But no sooner had he spoken those words then a cloud appeared.

In the Bible, clouds are often a symbol for God's presence. Remember how God had led the Israelites through the desert with a cloud and appeared to Moses in a cloud. Then the voice of God thundered from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him."

I doubt Peter wanted to hear those words. Peter had rebuked Jesus earlier for about talking about His coming death. Now the very voice of God was saying, "listen to Him."
Jesus' death was an awful truth Peter did not want to confront, yet there are some truths we must confront.

Have you ever been confronted with a message that changed your perspective? A pastor had announced that the Lenten theme would be forty days of love. He wanted the congregation to put that love into practice. He encouraged them to show their love and appreciation in different ways. The first week they were encouraged to send notes to people who had made positive contributions to their lives.

After the service a man came to the pastor to speak with him. The pastor described him as a kind of "macho, former football player type who loved to hunt and fish, a strong self-made man." The man told his pastor, "I love you and I love this church, but I am not going to participate in this "forty days of love" stuff. It's ok for some folks," he said, "but it's a little too sentimental and syrupy for me."

Then he walked away from the pastor. A week later, the man waited after church to see his pastor again. "I want to apologize for what I said last Sunday about the forty days of love. I realized on Wednesday that I was wrong." The pastor asked, "What happened on Wednesday?" "I got one of those letters!" the man said. "It was a total surprise from a person I never expected to hear from. It touched me so deeply I carry it around in my pocket all the time. "

"Every time I read it," he said, "I get tears in my eyes." It was a transforming moment in this man's life. Suddenly he realized he was loved by others in the church. This

changed his entire outlook. "I was so moved by that letter," he said, "I sat down and wrote ten letters myself."

God had broken into this man's life in a surprising way and he was changed. It might not have been on a mountaintop, but it had the exact same effect as the disciples experienced. When God breaks into our lives we are changed. We have a simple way of saying that. We call it "Everyday disciples: Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!"

Mountaintop experiences prepare us for life in the valleys, where God calls us to serve. That's an important thing for us to remember. Jesus even told His disciples not to tell anyone about what they seen until the right time. Jesus and the disciples still had work to do. This mountaintop experience played a major role in the lives of these three disciples. However brief the experience was, they were given a glimpse of the future.

You may remember a reporter named Terry Anderson. He grew up in Batavia. Much like today, in 1984 he became a hostage in the Middle East. Right before that, he had vacationed with his fiancé, Madelyn in England where they were visiting her father.

Terry had looked forward to some peace and quiet from his hectic career as a journalist. He was so dispirited that it took some days to settle down even in this pleasant atmosphere of this English hamlet.

As he walked through the streets with Madelyn, inhaling the crisp air, he noticed a church steeple outlined against the pale blue sky. For some reason, he felt drawn to this old church. Terry had been brought up in the church but had drifted far from God and, in his own words, considered himself an agnostic. That afternoon he wondered why that church had captured his attention.

He decided to walk to the church. He opened the heavy oaken doors, stepped in and sat down on a worn pew. Looking up at the altar and cross gleaming in the shadows, he suddenly had the strong sense of coming home. Terry reaffirmed his faith that day.

For the next six months Terry wondered why he had been drawn to that church. He thought perhaps God was calling, but could not figure out why. He was beginning to sense a closer relationship with God, when on a street in Beirut, he was shoved at gunpoint into the back of a car. His face was pressed to the floor and a blanket thrown over him as the car accelerated. The day was March 16, 1985.

While in captivity, Anderson began reading the Bible. He found the strength to endure years of captivity in the promise that God was with him. The mountaintop experience in the little English church was preparation for what lay ahead.

When God breaks into our lives, revealing His Glory, we are reminded that we're joined to Him. The words of the Gospel remind us, "And Jesus was transfigured before them." What a difference that made to the three disciples and makes for us. It happens suddenly. Whatever the location, it feels like a mountaintop. When it happens, our perspective is changed for life.

On the other hand, such occurrences prepare us for life in the valley. Jesus reminds us we cannot stay up in that rarified air of the mountaintop experience. The work God has for us to do is in our daily lives. "Mountaintop experiences" remind us that, whatever our situation, because Jesus lives in us we can live in Him.

Count me in: Share a God-experience with someone this week.