

Trying to explain the unexplainable.

It's a natural human characteristic. It doesn't matter what we encounter....we desire to ultimately try to explain it; to rationalize it.

Somehow by being able to explain our encounters, we gain control over them.

Or so we think.

But what happens when we encounter something we can't explain?

What happens when there are no words?

Have you ever had an encounter of mystery where you can't explain it?

Peter, James and John walk up the highest peak in all of Israel, Mt. Herman, with Jesus. A man of human flesh just like them. But what they encounter at the top is something they can't explain. Even the author of Mark's gospel, struggles to put it into words.

Jesus was "transfigured" whiter than white, dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach clothes on earth. There are no words to fully contain what has happened here on the mountain.

Jesus is transfigured. Transformed. A radical change has occurred right before the disciple's eyes! Forget the fact that they are also seeing two dead prophets, Elijah and Moses, in front of them too!

NO, - Jesus is no longer seen as the man of simple human flesh who came up the mountain with them.

He is transfigured. Transformed. Radically changed. Changed into a brilliance beyond words.

We often speak in the church of the "Mystery of Christ." The mystery of his conception, life and miracles, his death, and his resurrection.

➔ Mystery.

I fear we speak too often of the mystery from a distance rather than close up and personal.

Have you ever had an encounter of mystery where you can't explain it?

I feel sometimes we shy away from speaking of such mystery encounters, and we leave it to our Pentecostal Evangelical brothers and sisters to share and proclaim the mystery of God and God's love and forgiveness.

Have you ever had an encounter of mystery where you can't explain it?

I have.

I think most of us have to some degree or another, if we truly think about it.

Encountering the unexplainable. An encounter which transfigures, transforms.... leaves us changed...sometimes radically changed. But we Lutherans get uncomfortable talking about such things. Talking about the unexplainable. Talking about the Mystery.

It was July 1996. I had been unable to conceive a child for a couple years. I had done everything. Except I hadn't handed it over to God. Finally one night I literally raised my empty hands, shoving them towards God and said, "It's in your hands now. I'm in your hands. I give."

I went to bed that night with a sense of calm which I hadn't had from years of disappointment leading up to that moment.

But that night, something mysterious happened; something which I can't explain.

That night I had a dream...or a vision...I don't know. All I know was in the morning, I had to touch everything to make sure I was awake, and even then I wasn't convinced of which realm was real and which was not.

My dream was simple...and yet ...not.

I stood alone, barefoot, in a lush green freshly cut field of grass. My toes could move and squeeze the grass and moist dirt below. Yet, I couldn't see anything beyond 10 feet all around me. I was surrounded by a white cloud in every direction. Every side. Even above. It wasn't a cold cloud, but rather a soft warm welcoming cloud. But thick, and not penetrable to be seen through. And yet, from beyond, from behind this cloud of comfort and welcome, there came a voice. Solid. Bold. Gentle. One word was spoken: "HEARKEN."

"HEARKEN." It was repeated again and again all night, with enough pause between each word. "HEARKEN." But the word was not only spoken, it actually entered into my very being, penetrating me at my core; vibrating within me when it spoke.

"HEARKEN."

Right before I awoke from this comforting and yet strange and mysterious encounter, I felt something in my empty hand at my side. It was then I looked down, and saw a child's hand in mine. No face. Just a child's hand.

And then I awoke. Still feeling the vibration of the word in me. "HEARKEN."

A month later I found out I was pregnant.

An encounter with the unexplainable. A mysterious encounter which radically changed me. To this day, I can still hear AND feel that voice. HEARKEN.

It means to listen. To follow. To obey.

I have heard others share their experiences of mystery too. Maybe it was the miraculous disappearance of a tumor, or the “being in the right place at the right time” when there was no reason for them to be there – only to be called to save a life – literally; or to be saved themselves. I’ve heard of people encountering visions and feelings, voices, and symbols which cannot be explained by mere language, but also can’t be denied.

Have you ever had an encounter of mystery where you can’t explain it?

I wonder how many times we miss encounters of mystery because we, like Peter, jump to explain it before it has been completely revealed to us.

Peter sees Jesus transfigured from human to divine, from mere flesh to something other of mystery and brilliance. And he quickly goes to wanting to stay near, to reside, to build something to mark this encounter. In doing so, he almost misses the encounter altogether.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Listen to him. Listen.

Be still....stop trying to explain what’s happening...just listen. Be present in this moment. Just be. Pay attention or you’re going to miss out!

These are moments which are unexplainable gifts.

As Jesus is transformed into an unexplainable brilliance, the disciples are fearful, and yet are drawn in.

I wonder if we aren’t so different. As much as we want an encounter with God, we simultaneously fear the presence of God because we fear being changed, being transformed. What we have, who we are, may not be everything we want, but at least we know it, are used to it, and find comfort in it. And so when God comes and unsettles the orderly lives we’ve constructed, we try to silence and hide and explain away those disruptive experiences in a way to keep our lives in our own control.

But the mystery of God’s love is unexplainable! And it should be unsettling! And it should transform our lives. Encountering God’s brilliance: It changes you!

Yet, Jesus doesn’t stay visibly brilliant on the mountain.

Jesus comes down that mountain and enters back into the destruction and ugliness of our world. Jesus chooses to journey with a world of sinners and doubters. Jesus chooses to be with us.

After the transfiguration, Jesus turns immediately from the furthest corner and highest peak of Israel, and heads directly to Jerusalem. To the place where his true brilliance will shine in the greatest darkness. To a place where God’s love and forgiveness will be radically encountered.

Jesus' light may not always be seen in the darkness. But it is there. It is present. Do we miss it in our busy lives and our attempts to explain away mysterious encounters?

The transfiguration is a sign that the light of Christ, glowing in our hearts, marks us as witnesses to both ultimate beauty and to a death that ushers in love and forgiveness.

God gives light, unveils faces, and as written to the Corinthians, shines in our hearts. God alone has the power to engulf prophets in clouds and whirlwinds, to mesmerize disciples, to transform, and to make human beings crave proximity to the divine.

We see the light of Christ in the meal of God's word and the meal of the bread and wine. Jesus is made present to us in the readings, the preaching, the prayers, the songs, the food, AND ...in one another. The brilliant light of transfiguration and transformation shines in each of US! In the mystery of God's grace in the Word and Meal we are transformed...we are radically changed. We become the brilliant light to the world.

I have come to believe that if we wish to encounter the mystery of God, we will find it literally sitting right beside us. The mystery of God, the light of Christ, is encountered in the mystery of the other.

Listen. See. Be present. Slow down.

There is power in stories. I believe this!

Have you ever had an encounter of mystery you can't explain?

Share God's mystery of encounter with another. Shine your light. Shine the light of Christ. The Day of Transfiguration is a celebration of light and change.

We can't explain the gracious gift of God's love and forgiveness.

We can't explain the mystery of the resurrected Christ.

We can't explain the mystery of miracles and signs.

Don't try to.

Just accept it.

It's a gift.

This season of Lent, may you change from explaining, to listening.

May you change from a direction of comfort, to one of being unsettled and radically changed.

May you share the light of Christ within you, unveiling and sharing your stories of unexplainable encounters with one another.

Amen.