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In the name of God, by whose Word and grace we might all be transformed. Amen.

Jesus took Peter and James and John with him as he went up on the mountain to pray. So says the first verse of the scripture we just heard. Allow me to describe more fully the scene. According to Luke, and also Mark and Matthew, about a week before this climb up the mountain, Peter had spoken aloud the words that professed his conviction that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the messiah from God. It was only the disciples who heard Peter speak and Jesus had warned them not to say anything about it to anyone. Then Jesus had prophesied his suffering and death after being rejected by the chief priests and elders. He had prophesied his being raised on the third day. It was after this prophecy that Jesus had challenged them all, as his words challenge us. He said to them, and the words apply to us, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me." He says to us, "Let him, or her, renounce him or herself *EVERY DAY*, IF following me is your goal." Those words should give us pause. It certainly gave the disciples pause.

So it was a week after Jesus had put forth that condition when he went up the mountain taking Peter, James and John with him. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all share this story about Jesus and the details are nearly identical, except that Luke tells us that the reason for this journey was so Jesus could pray. Now we know from the many stories about Jesus that he often went off alone to pray after extensive periods of ministry. It was his pattern to commit himself to deep periods of prayer to restore his spiritual strength. It was a symptom of his being fully human that his ministry was so tiring. Emptying himself, being one hundred percent available to

someone else was physically, emotionally and spiritually draining. Many of you have likely experienced that feeling of utter exhaustion after grieving with someone, or caring for an injured or ill person. Recovery time after those experiences is necessary.

The scene on the mountain that Luke describes affirms that the three disciples were caught up with Jesus in this mystical but real experience. Luke says that while Peter was speaking a cloud came and overshadowed them and they were terrified but they entered it anyway. The cloud is an Old Testament reference to God's presence. In the Torah God moves in a "pillar of cloud." The cloud is the realm where God is in control. The cloud is the realm where humans are not in control. When Peter, James, John and Jesus entered the cloud might they have let go of any human plans or desire to flee and just allowed themselves to be led by God's spirit? Is that why they were terrified? I mean, was God really there? Could they trust that He was?

Then Luke says a voice came from the cloud affirming Jesus. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" This was the defining moment letting Peter, James and John know just who Jesus was. It was a confirmation of his chosen-ness; a chosen-ness that had first been established at his baptism. But baptism only marks the beginning. It did for Jesus and it does for us. After being baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus went about learning more of who he was by *being* more of the person God wanted him to be. This moment on the mountain crowns his ministry among all Jews and all people everywhere. This moment puts the icing on the cake, so to speak. This moment connects Jesus more firmly to his team of disciples. It connects him more firmly to his tribal past, to the tribe that was established by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses.

But that tribe, the orthodox Hebrew people were not present in this moment. They were at the bottom of the mountain, not clear about what or who this man named Jesus was. Yet Jesus was here, as this moment confirms, to usher in a new way to be in relationship not only with God but with each other. This new way was INclusive, not EXclusive. The sinners were allowed in, given access to the rewards of renewed relationship with God.

We have come now to a moment in human social evolution when it is more possible than ever to bring in the kind of world that God wishes for us; a world where all people might have the opportunity to flourish in genuine community with each other. The new age is made possible by the modern technical invention of cyberspace. We are now in the position prophesied by Isaiah in 6th century BC. Isaiah 2 verse 2 reads "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it."

Forget about the fact that we have come to learn modern geography and know that the so called mountains of Israel do not compare to Mt. McKinley or Mt. Everest. We understand what Isaiah meant. God, is our common God. It doesn't matter what name a particular culture or religious group assigns to that omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent energy. God is an energy that exists just beyond our grasp. So far beyond our grasp that God must dwell, the ancients thought, on the highest mountain. But God also exists, paradoxically, at our fingertips and flows in, through and around us.

Jesus the man was rejected by his tribe. Similarly, we are prevented from achieving the world god dreams for us precisely because of our own tribalism. There are good things about tribes. They protect us, we feel at home in them. Tribal members

share a history and practice distinct customs. In some ways, you could say we are a St. John's tribe, or even an Episcopal tribe. But the danger is that tribes can become insular. As Christians we need to stand firmly against becoming insular because Jesus was anything but insular. We need to hold each other accountable to answer Jesus' call to us to take up our cross every day and follow him.

We have an amazing opportunity with the invention of cyberspace to expand our connections with each other - even across geographic borders and social boundaries. But as we do that we need to hold on to a moral foundation; a foundation that I believe began on that mountain with Jesus, Peter, James and John. God laid that foundation for us when he said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

I am reading a book by Tom Friedman called "Thank You for Being Late, *An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations.*"¹ Chapter 11 is entitled "Is God in Cyberspace?" One of the scholars Friedman consulted while exploring this question said that "quote" in this post biblical Jewish tradition, God is always hidden, whether in cyberspace or in the neighborhood shopping mall, and to have God in the room with your, whether it's a real room or a chat room, you have to bring Him there yourself by how you behave there, by the moral choices and mouse clicks you make."end quote"²

Let us make moral choices guided by our faith in Christ Jesus and come together with each other to bring forth the kind of world that God dreams for us.

¹ Friedman, Tom; Thank You For Being Late; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016

² *ibid*, p339