



**"God's Relentless Invitation"**  
**Sermon by Rev. David D. Colby**  
**Luke 9:28-43**

MARCH 3, 2019

Every time I am confronted with a Scripture passage like this passage from Luke, one that displays God's mysterious nature and ability, I think of all the children in our midst. I find this kind of mystical revelation astounding and unimaginable, and they would be asking a lot of questions and are more than likely to come to terms with the mystery. Even as a child myself, I remember moments of learning - a moment when I didn't know exactly what something was or what something could be - and I had to sit in the curiosity and wonder and think about the possibilities.

I observed an example of this last summer before a Sunday worship service as an almost two year old and her mother went through the wooden blocks trying to name every color. The mother picked up each piece and showed her daughter saying, "This is blue. This is yellow. This is green. Okay, now you try." The daughter picked up each block and said, "This is blue. This is yellow. And, this is purple." The Mom chuckled and said, "remember this one is

green." And the daughter said, "no this is purple."

The daughter then picked up all the other blocks saying, "this is purple, too!" Before we knew it, all the blocks were purple. And when the mother tried to say, "Well actually this is blue and yellow and green," the daughter replied with that infamous question of the two year old - "Why?"

There is inherent curiosity and wonder in children about why things are the way they are and who decided that green is green and purple is purple? Why can't it be something else if I see it as something else or experience it as something else?

A bunch of dining room chairs and blankets can become a castle. The freshly fallen snow becomes a battleground. The suds in the kitchen sink are my makeshift facial hair. As children we read books about fantasy and every day we are invited to see the world through many different lenses and use our imagination to think critically about

the world, but also to think creatively about the world.

And then there comes a point in time, if we are so unfortunate, that our curiosity weans and our wonder becomes less about possibilities and more about the terms of reality. A dining room chair is a chair. The snow is frozen water. The kitchen sink is a chore. Books are for instruction. Green is green and purple is purple. Rather than spend everyday and moment in curiosity and wonder, we ground ourselves in what we know to be true and it's only when we are confronted with the unusual that we pick up the practice of intentional imagination.

I wonder if that is what John and James and Peter were thinking when Jesus invited them to join him up to the mountaintop to pray. At this point, the disciples had been faithful, but were living in their terms of reality and had trouble really accepting Christ's identity.

Jesus had certainly given the disciples plenty of opportunities to witness the unusual and imagine with him. His ministry of teaching and healing was very public. The disciples had been with Jesus while he cleansed lepers and healed diseases. When they followed him through the valley, they witnessed Christ raise a man and little girl from the dead. He rebuked the storm on a sea to a calm wind and drove demons out of people. They had seen some pretty remarkable things that were seemingly unusual. I would expect that, given those events and circumstances, the disciples would be constantly living in wonder and awe and imagination of what was possible with Christ.

But, even after all of that, when they went with him to Bethsaida, and saw the five thousand hungry people and their small provisions, they told Christ to send the people away because they only saw what they had before them, not what was possible. They were still looking at Christ and not quite seeing who was there.

Now, Jesus is inviting them up to the mountaintop with him.

And the experience was so profound. After continually witnessing Jesus' work down below, at the very moment that they reach the mountaintop they see Jesus' body completely transfigured before the three of them. His face changes and he is dazzling in white. Suddenly, he is surrounded by Moses and Elijah who were sharing the prophecy Jesus had just predicted of his own death. As their figures began to diminish, the disciples were so amazed and astonished and overcome that Peter started talking without even knowing what he was saying.

A cloud descended over them and the voice of God said, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him!" If they had any question about who Jesus was - this moment should have been the answer. In this message on the mountaintop God visually and orally proclaimed that Jesus' identity is in line with the faith and in line with the prophets and leaders of Moses and Elijah. God revealed Christ for who Christ really is: the Messiah that has been promised by the prophets, in the narratives of their faith and in that moment right before their eyes and ears.

A question I ask myself at this point is why were only John and James and Peter invited to go? So many of Jesus' profound moments were largely public, yet this invitation was very intimate. God invited James and John and Peter to witness the fulfillment of their faith and to see, breaking into their ordinary, the revelation of God. The revelation and witness of God has been shown to God's people over and over and over again throughout generations, though it has taken many forms. In the beginning, God was direct with God's people. God communicated to Abraham through the stars. God's witness to Noah comes to us in the rainbow. God came to Moses in a burning bush and to Daniel through the writing on a wall. God came to kings in their dreams, and to many people through miracles, just like the ones that Jesus, God in the flesh, performed on earth.

Maybe the reason only a few disciples were brought up the mountain was because, just like the others God came to, God was inviting these disciples to invite others to participate in that transformative experience with them. Jesus could have just gone up there alone. But, instead, these disciples were invited to join him and to imagine and experience the astonishment and wonder of the way that God appeared to them, in this magnificent transfiguration. And, in return, to invite others to experience God in the wonder and astonishment found in the way God might appear to them.

But they kept silent and told no one.

The very next day they descend the mountaintop and, lest they forget the call, have work to do. A man comes to Jesus and explains that his son needs healing.

He had asked the disciples to help him and they had not been able to do it. Jesus, exasperated at this point, sees that here again was an invitation set before the disciples to be a part of God's work in the world and they had not been able to do it.

Jesus' response shows just how invested he had been in inviting others to witness with him. He reached a point of frustration and cried out, "How much longer must I live with you and bear with you?" How many times must I show myself to you for you to see me? How often must I prove to you what you are capable of for you to act on it? How much longer must I bear with you as in your disbelief you miss the wonder and possibility of God?

Our life and faith really depends on wonder and possibility. We are each still informed by the curiosity and imagination that hasn't left us since our youth. We have each had our own encounters with the mystery and wonder of God, but sometimes when we are really faced with it, whether its on the ground or up on the mountaintop - we freeze. We stop the wonder in its tracks. Green is green and purple is purple. We keep silent and tell no one.

The Good News is that God's invitation to us is relentless. God never stops inviting us to see God's glowing face and to do God's transformative work and to share God's saving message. Even when Jesus was frustrated at the way the disciples wanted to turn away 5,000 people. God invited them again. Even when they saw Jesus standing up there with Moses and Elijah and didn't say a word. God invited them again. Even when Jesus chastised them

for not helping a man whose son needed healing. God invited them again.

Think about the ways that God has invited you.

We are a people who are invited, and just as we did in the blanket fort and the hairy bubbles, our realm of possibility is not earthly. We get to see the world through many different lenses and use our imagination to think critically about the world, but also to think creatively about the world.

How has God invited you?

In the knowledge of God's work through the Holy Scripture? In the faces of the other who is sitting beside you; a personal reflection of God's face? In the work you do? In the places you travel? In the waters, where we find life? In the planting and reaping of the seeds? In the sounds we hear? In the quiet? In the bushes? On the mountaintop? In the valley? In our life? In death?

How have you invited others? With a voice? With a hand? With an open ear and an open mind? With a meal - like Jesus did?

In the bread that we eat and the cup that we drink, together, God invites us to wonder and imagine and believe. God invites us to remember who God is and was and will be and who we are as people of God.

Amen.