

MARK 9:2-9  
MARCH 5, 2000  
YEAR B

Have you ever had any aha moments that were life changing for you? That cause you to see yourself and the world differently and were so revealing that you lived your life differently afterwards?

I am not necessarily talking about being struck by lightning or actually hearing the voice of God as clearly as you can hear mine, but moments in which something finally made sense to you and filled you with light?

I can remember one of my first ahas with the divine. I was 13 years old at church camp. having been raised in the catholic church my image of God had always been of a terrifying father -- distant, cold, demanding, and punishing. Something to be feared. I did find comfort in Jesus, because for me as a child Jesus was a real person, gentle, loving, a teacher and friend. But not even Jesus could protect me from the wrath of God.

So, as a 13 year old I had a lot of trouble trying to make sense of how Jesus and God worked together. Until I went to a United Methodist church camp that my friends had invited me to. There I actually saw people having fun, laughing and singing all the while claiming to be Christians. It was there one evening after dinner as we gathered outside on the grass to sing camp songs that I was taught a very simple song called beloved.

As I sang that song and listened to the words and experienced the love in that circle of new friends that I finally got it. God is not cold, scary, and dark like the insides of a Catholic church. God is love. Every time I feel love or love others God is there. God is love. God is with me all the time if I open myself to love.

Now I know that might seem like a little aha -- but for me it was life-changing. it is the reason why I am here today as a pastor.

I wanted other people to get it like I had sitting around that campfire on the grass at a camp in Ohio. My mission, my passion is to help others experience and understand God is love. A love that is within and without. God is not distant -- it is us who put God at a distance when we choose not to have compassion for ourselves or for anyone else.

And for me the only way I see trying to share that message is through being a part of a community of faith. where the rubber meets the road. where we are confronted every time we meet with differences, different personalities, different perspectives, different backgrounds, different ages, different lifestyles. This is our training ground for love -- learning to love and feeling loved even when we disagree or can't understand one another. Because if I can't love here with you -- I can't experience God, because, as John says, God is love-

Now if you would have asked me after that camp experience if I knew what I was going to do with my life -- I would have probably said, an artist. It took me another ten years to figure out I needed to go to seminary to appease my soul. And another five years after going to seminary to figure out that my place was here as a pastor of a community of faith.

I do know though that whatever I do, wherever my life leads me, I will have a passion to share that message of love and acceptance.

I think if all of us took some time we too could journey back in time and be able to point to a moment that has changed our lives forever. I call these moments divine, holy. A time when we stumble upon the thin places between us and God.

That is what Peter and the others experienced on that mountain with Jesus. a thin place where God was palpable. A moment that words could not or will not ever be adequate enough to explain the experience. A sense a taste of the infinite as Friedrich Schleiermacher would say. these moments can happen anywhere at any time.

And even though they may grip our hearts and minds we find it so hard to share with others.

And I think there are many reasons why. First of all, like Peter and those disciples it is hard for us to make sense out of what we experienced. It may take us years to fully understand ourselves let alone explain to others. We may need time to process by ourselves.

I also know that those experiences are deeply personal. What if in our sharing, others treat it as insignificant or judge us as being a little off. So, we may, ourselves, tend to downplay their importance in our lives.

But epiphany's are important. So important an entire season of the church year is called Epiphany. It begins after Christmas and ends the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and Lent.

Epiphanies give us hope and vision for the future. They remind us of our connection to God -- reminding us of why we are here, whose we are, and what is ultimately important. Epiphanies challenge us to claim our mission, or purpose in life.

God tells the disciples in this story to listen to Jesus. Take time to listen, to reflect and to integrate our holy moments into our lives.