



There are a lot of things people are afraid of, causing great anxiety to the sufferer when they are exposed to the source of the phobia. I am sure you have heard of claustrophobia – the fear of closed spaces or acrophobia – the fear of heights. There are some unusual phobias that, perhaps, you haven't heard of:

Cyberphobia - the fear of computers; Lunaphobia - the fear of the moon; Chrometophobia - the fear of spending money; Glossophobia - the fear speaking in public; Homilphobia – the fear of sermons; Nyctophobia - fear of the dark; Scoptophobia - the fear of being stared at; Tonitrophobia - the fear of storms; Triskaidekaphobia – the fear of the number 13, just to name a few.

I have a couple of phobias – claustrophobia, in particular, but one that I also have is seldom encountered, thank goodness. It's called gephyrophobia. I have a fear of driving over long span bridges like the Sunshine Skyway in Florida, a 5-8 minute drive, and the Burlington Skyway, bridges that seem to go sky-high as you travel over them, bridges that cover a lot of water! The last one I had to cross several times nine years ago in preparation for our son's wedding in St. Catharines. Fortunately, I was always in the passenger seat, and deliberately kept my eyes focussed on the book I was usually reading. No appreciation of the view from me!

I'm fine with our bridge in Campbellford; it's a short and nonthreatening crossing. Yet bridges are the means by which we get from one place to another. Bridges are conduits of passage and transition. Without them, we could not get on with the business of life. So I cross them, albeit with some trepidation—or stay put, and never get to my destination. (sermon story starter adapted)*

This Last Sunday after the Epiphany....is a transition Sunday, a bridge we are asked to cross to arrive at our annual observance of Lent and eventually Easter. *

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is glorious, wonderful, amazing! We know this story. Every step up the mountain. Every word spoken by a human or from a cloud. And every reaction from the disciples. The story in our text today is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and it's the source of the phrase, "a mountaintop experience."

Those who go to the mountaintop come back changed.

Mountains appear in biblical texts as places where God dwells and where holy people go to be in the presence of God. Mountains are places of refuge and places of prayer and transition.

The scripture lessons from the Old and New Testaments this morning are like bookends. On one side of the bookshelf we have Moses going up on Mount Sinai to meet with God. He is summoned into the "glory of the Lord" ...and enter the cloud" to receive the Law by which the Israelites were expected to live.

Next, we have Peter sharing his transfiguration experience, reminding people that he, too, received "honour and glory from God the Father" on the mountain top. These passages are natural 'lead ins' for today's Gospel on the other side of the bookshelf.

We have Jesus going up the mountain with disciples Peter, James and his brother, John. Jesus has told them about his impending death and resurrection, and his warning of the cost of following him. Perhaps they needed to re-centre themselves for their work; perhaps these three were being called out for a new level of responsibility. Whatever the reason, this small group was heading up the mountain for a time of retreat.

Then Jesus is transformed in front of his disciples, and his face shines like the sun and his clothes become dazzling white. Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus ~ Matthew does not detail their conversation. But then they are covered by a bright cloud and hear a voice ~ as Peter in our New Testament reading describes it: the voice from heaven ~ "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" This shining cloud, what the Bible calls "God's Glory," the sure sign of God's presence, is what the disciple Peter saw. He didn't see any dwellings for a meeting place like the Old Testament story of Moses in the wilderness, so he offered to build some. "He knew that God was right there, and that tent or no tent, he was standing as close as he was ever going to get to the only kind of meeting that really matters." **



Episcopal priest and author, Barbara Brown Taylor, calls today *Swing Sunday*, "[the Sunday] between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent--the day those who follow Jesus look down at our maps and say, "Uh-oh," because it is time to turn away from the twinkling stars of Christmas toward the deep wilderness of Lent. As gloomy as that may sound, it is very good news." **

The Transfiguration was a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus, leading him to Jerusalem, and, ultimately, the Cross, and the good news that Lent offers us is our own transformation, because I think the key words of the passage occur when, from the cloud, the voice from heaven says to the disciples, "listen to Him!" We embark on our own spiritual journeys in the next six weeks, where the voice of God affirms us, and points us in the direction we are to go.

We humans are curious; we want to know things. We want Google always at our fingertips to tell us everything about anything, and we want social media sites such as Facebook to instantly tell us everything else ~ what our family and friends have been doing or if anyone 'likes' a photo we've uploaded to our page. And, for faithful Christians, that's no different in our relationship with God. We want to know things about God. We want to learn how to relate to God. We'd like to know right now, please.

But a relationship with God isn't so easy. God isn't composed of a series of Google search results. God is a mystery. His presence is enveloped in a cloud.

With the season of Lent beginning on Wednesday, we need to remove ourselves from the daily distractions of our gadgets and embark on a "nice long spell in the wilderness." **

The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain is a faith story – an encounter with God. Peter was changed on that mountaintop, and we are invited to enter the cloud and share this "glorious vision, one that does not remove the cross, but which transfigures everything and enables us to bear it, having seen who Jesus is and where he is—God with us and in us and among us." *

This Epiphany story is the bridge to the next phase of the Christian year.

Those who go to the mountaintop come back changed. Are you ready to cross the bridge, listen to Him, and deepen your journey in faith?

Amen.

* "The Last Sunday After Epiphany: The Transfiguration" by Father Nicholas Lang, February 3, 2020, standrewsmilford.org

** "The Bright Cloud of Unknowing" by The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, March 2, 2014, day1.org