

“What Just Happened?”

Mark 9:2-9

It had always seemed to Emily, ever since she could remember that she was very near to a world of wonderful beauty. Between it and herself hung only a thin curtain; she could never draw the curtain aside – but sometimes, just for a moment, a wind fluttered it and then it was as if she caught a glimpse of the enchanting realm beyond – and heard a note of unearthly music... And always when the flash came to her Emily felt that life was a wonderful, mysterious thing of persistent beauty.

~ L. M. Montgomery *Emily of New Moon*

Ever been in one of those situations or places where you experienced something special, beautiful, serendipitous, and so potent with an unfathomable meaning that immediately after, it left you wondering, “What just happened?” I hope that you have! I have. Not often, not often enough! But I have.

Unfortunately, there can be times we say this when we were having a conversation with friend or family and suddenly something in the conversation turns sour, disagreeable and they abruptly shut off conversation and storm off!

I not talking about that sort of “What just happened?” In those circumstances, if we are honest with ourselves, we will find something that we said or did that turn that conversation. No real mystery if we give it some thought!

No, I am talking about those moments, fleeting though they may be when things seem to come together, and our field of vision is expanded or perhaps focused.

As the character Ray Kinsella (played by Kevin Costner) in *Field of Dreams* quotes author Terrence Mann (James Earl Jones) as saying:

“There comes a time when all the cosmic tumblers have clicked into place — and the universe opens itself up for a few seconds to show you what’s possible.”

In the film, Terrence Mann also laments the tragic fact that most folks aren't even aware of that opening when it occurs, so they never walk through the doors that will lead them into their life's potential.

Such encounters can give meaning to our lives; some can even be life-altering events. They also can be frustrating. Try explaining such an experience to someone else! Even the simplest of events like something you just saw but those around you did not experience.

It’s like trying to describe a Summer solstice sunset over Lake Michigan. It’s the end of the longest day of the year; the lake is a perfect calm, unusual for Lake Michigan. The sphere of the Sun appears to swell at it approaches the horizon. The sky is so clear and the horizon so distinct you can see the edge of it as the sun slides into the waters. One almost wants to hold their breath during the few minutes it takes for the sun to slip out of sight. But even then, it isn’t really out of sight. The orange, pink, green colors radiate out from the point of its departure. It is a magical moment. Those gathered on the bluff with you go silent. Only an occasional whispered, “Look at that!” is heard.

Maine poet Ken Nye, who lived in an old farm near Bethel, Maine wrote a poem titled: *Woodland Picnic*. In this poem he writes about riding in the back seat of a car the woods sliding by when suddenly he catches the sight of a doe with two fawns feeding on her milk.

He cries out to his wife who is driving, “Stop the car! Pull over. Back up!”

By the time his wife stops the car and backs up, the scene of this woodland picnic has gone. The doe and her fawns fledged away into the woods. The moment has passed. The last stanza of his poem reads:

When we get home I try to recreate for them
the tableau of that woodland picnic
that danced across my screen of awareness
as I lolled in the backseat.
they get the general idea.

But the general idea is not what I wanted them to see.

The event Christians call the “Transfiguration” was such a personal, powerful, mystical, other worldly experience that it must have been difficult for Peter, James and John to describe to those left in the valley what they had actually encountered on the mountain, for it was more than something they had just “seen.”

We see with our eyes which are linked to our brains, but my sense is this ran much deeper than the stimulation of optical nerves and the excitement of brain neurons and chemical flashes in the synapses.

We have become so accustomed in our world today of seeing things that are computer generated “CGI”, photoshopped and edited that seeing is no longer believing! We need, perhaps even long for, encounters with something that is ultimately real and beyond ourselves and beyond our ability to create whether in nature or on the computer screen.

We need encounters of the Divine Nature. More accurately perhaps, we need to be more receptive to such encounters for I believe they are happening all around us all the time!

Be careful though, for if you have such an authentic encounter, you will be transfigured/transformed, maybe even in ways your friends, colleagues, even fellow churchgoers may not understand! *Even in ways that may not fit a previous understanding of faith and life that you have held dear.*

It was Gordon Cosby, one of the founding members of the Church of the Savior in Washington D.C., who said,

“If men and women today began by the thousands to experience the depths of Jesus Christ in a transforming way, there would simply be no place for their experience to fit into the present-day strait jackets of Christianity.”

My first response to this was “Wow!” and then “Ow!” For Gordon Cosby speaks an uncomfortable truth in this!

Within the stream of Christian spirituality influenced by the Celts of northern Europe and what is now the British Isles there is this awareness that there are many “thin places” in the world. Those places of which L. M. Montgomery speaks when she writes, of that “thin curtain” that Emily could never draw aside herself – but sometimes an unexpected breeze allowed her for a moment to catch a glimpse of the enchanting realm beyond.

“...catching a glimpse of that enchanting realm...”

For some these “thin places” are very physical locations,

a glade deep in the forest,

an outcropping ledge high on a mountain,

a wistful slice of remote sandy beach...

For some it is staring with craned neck at the overwhelming grandeur of a grand cathedral, for another they are found in the simplicity and quiet of a country chapel...

For some “thin places” can be found only in quiet moments...

for others it is in music and motion...

Whether physical locations or places within our hearts or our souls, our aim should be to anticipate these encounters, to learn to wait for such moments. For we cannot find them by seeking them. It is not a matter of human will. They in a sense just come to us as gifts.

I often said how it is exceedingly difficult and really, unproductive to argue against another's experience. In the same way, it is also exceedingly difficult to explain an experience of the Holy to someone else. They are by their very nature intensely personal.

So, don't get too frustrated with the rest of us when we cannot "see" what you just experienced but encourage us in our own uncovering of the wonderful world that lies just beyond our reach, yet from moment to moment we find ourselves in an opening and can "see" those marvelous glimpses of God's good creation as it should be. And to do this we need to open our eyes, our minds and our lives to new experiences and we to really listen and look for glimpses of the holy in the experiences of others. For life truly is as Emily of New moon understood it: "*a wonderful, mysterious thing of persistent beauty.*"