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Matthew 17:1-9

They went up to the top of the mountain, just a few of them, by themselves, just the boys. In my brother's words, they went on a "mancation," Peter, James, John, Jesus to be visited miraculously by Moses and Elijah. It was just the boys up there on their mancation and they were instructed not to tell anyone about what happened, until later, so who is to know if it really ever did, whatever it really is.

In the days leading up to this little trip to the mountains, back in the towns, the people were utterly befuddled, wondering whom on earth this Beloved of Humanity was. Some were saying John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah, others names of prophets we know to this day and some prophets whose testimonies were never recorded. Peter though, Peter when asked, he got it right. The disciples had been let into a secret, Jesus was the Beloved of Humanity, but again, it was inside information, they were told not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

In letting them in on this information Jesus also thought it prudent to warn them that the end was in sight, their Beloved's days were numbered. Which made absolutely no sense. Jesus' body was sound. He was strong; he was eating well and still knew how to share a healthy glass of wine. His legs were moving just fine and all the signs of impending death, of a body failing, were not showing.

Good Peter, the one with all the right answers took him aside to deny this claim that Jesus had made, that they wouldn't have many more days together, begging for Jesus to take it back. Take it back! It is not to be! Peter terrified, needy, his entire being slipping between his fingertips thinking about his beloved Jesus gone.

It had been a long day of explaining to the disciples and putting up with Peter's fears and doubts. Having enough, Jesus lost his temper, and was terse: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things!"

Realizing that the disciples were regressing in their anticipatory grief and that Jesus himself was in need of a break, it was time to take some time away, to go to the mountains.

This keeping of time, taking time, is what Jesus did when he was in need of refreshment. He went to the mountains and I imagine he hiked and sat on a plateau and took in the gaze of the wonder of creation. Perhaps he assured himself that life is bigger than just us with our problems. He talked with God and was told in his prayers that he was faithful, even when he lost his temper. He reflected on how hard it was, the balancing act he was living, holding the secrets of the world along with his public life, being present in all moments while knowing that his days were numbered, enjoying, laughing with, loving

his people while preparing them with life-changing knowledge. He went to the mountains to feel the earth underneath his body holding him and his feet on the ground. It was perspective he gained.

And the boys, they needed some perspective. It was time for a retreat. It was time for some time. It was time for a mancation.

It took six days to prepare, to finish some healing ceremonies and a few revivals, several necessary and hard conversations with local politicians and quality time with his mother. All the agenda items were ticked off, the list had been crossed out, the simple food prepared, the sleeping bags freshly laundered, and up they went to the high mountain, by themselves. Or so they thought.

The disciples for sure knew who Moses and Elijah were. I mean, they hadn't met them before but they knew. They had heard stories passed down for generations about these ones on whose shoulders they stood today. They had a consistent presence in the lives of the people in the towns and countryside alike. And there was the question swirling about, the question of "who is the Messiah?" The reasonable guess would be to think of Moses. Or Elijah perhaps. They were great leaders. They were to be revered. They were patient. They both had unusual deaths so maybe they had never even really passed from this life.

For all these thousands of years there may have been rumors that Moses and Elijah weren't yet gone. For Moses, he died at 120 years with strength and vigor. He could see farther than the regular person when he supposedly left the earth. And he died on the mountains, probably not all that far from the mountains where Jesus and his boys stood this day, while gazing at all that his people had been promised. He was grieved, yes, but to this day no one knows the site of his grave and so we wonder if he ever really was buried and gone. We wonder how it was he lived in a transitory state, 120 years of life and more energy than you and me combined, buried, but no one knows where, dead and yet plaguing the memories of all those on the earth.

And then there was Elijah, walking along with Elisha, sure of his end at any moment, and a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Here one minute, gone the next. One state of being and then another, so fast. Transitory still with his body whipped in a stream of fire and screaming horses. Not how people usually pass from this earth, his transition so very strange and unusual, so very fast and incomprehensible.

And so it was, their deaths most strange, their lives even more unusual, their spirits extraordinary, their legacy unquestionably present.

One minute the disciples were roasting marshmallows over the fire and singing songs, just like we did at church camp, and then the next was nothing like the first.

Jesus followed suit of extraordinary stories. I can imagine they didn't know what had hit them. They had just been told a few days before that Jesus was the Messiah, not any of

the ancestors that had gone before, none of them would come back to visit again. But you know how it is, when we realize something and think we don't have to realize it again but how easy it is to forget. Illustrative lessons are easier to remember than anything else.

And so he gave them one and was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Peter, James, John, they realized that this was not just some normal mancation. Jesus is not just a buddy that they could drink with and tell jokes around. He was the Messiah so he had to have moments like that of Moses and Elijah, those transitory moments of not quite here but not quite there, transitioning in between states of being with relative ease.

So *this* is what Jesus did when he went on the mountain to pray. Moses and Elijah came from out of nowhere, a cloud, a pillar of fire, maybe from the dirt itself and they began to talk, Moses, Elijah, Jesus. This is where Jesus went to find his colleagues who had gone before him, the balance of the Law and Prophecy themselves. And by appearing before Peter and James and John he illustrated quite dramatically the lesson that Jesus was of this world, and not of this world.

Elijah, Moses, Jesus they all were there and all were talking and Peter he wanted to make sure he was doing the right thing with the right answers. He compensated by appealing to his manners. "Lord, it is good for you to be here" he says to Jesus. Jesus never asked what Peter thought, but Peter wanted all to feel welcome. And so he asked if he could make dwellings for Moses and Elijah and Jesus, just so everyone could have their personal space when they felt it was necessary. And then he kept speaking, the others looking on "Lord, I would like to cook up the food we have brought for a special meal to welcome our...guests...this evening and if we could it would be nice if we could sit around the fire and perhaps we could ask Moses and Elijah a few questions since it was nice enough for them to come and visit us, and would you like a cup of tea right now? Or how about a glass of wine, I know you are particularly a fan of red wine, but what about Moses and Elijah? I think it would be..."

And then came the bright cloud that drowned out Peter's chatter and brought him and all the others to attention. "This is my Child, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Yes, listen, shut up. Peter had gotten the quiz right earlier, he himself said that Jesus was the Messiah, the Beloved of the Living God, but no one really knew...

It was scary, really frightening. If Jesus was the one then the king was not the one, if Jesus was the one and they really believed it then they would have to risk their lives too, Jesus couldn't do it for them. If Jesus was the one they were to follow then it wasn't status quo that they could accept anymore, then they too would have to be transitory, in between many different worlds, cultures, traditions, classes. And Jesus said that his days were numbered. They would have to do this alone. Or maybe they could go up to the mountaintop and spend quality time with Moses and Elijah. After Jesus was gone was

this where they would find him? They weren't sure, but they were scared and they fell to the ground in fear. Jesus wasn't gone yet though and as the ground was holding their bodies, Jesus came over and healed them like he had healed so many others, gave them his touch so they could remember that feeling when he was physically gone. He touched them and whispered in their ears, "do not be afraid. Get up."

It was the most peculiar vacation they had ever had. They really didn't know what they were getting into, thought they may get a few more well-meaning lectures by Jesus, a few parables told around the fire at night. But it was more than that they got. It was assurance, assurance to not be afraid of the life that they were called to lead. It was affirmation, affirmation that indeed they were committing their lives to one very powerful, one more powerful than any other human they had ever met. It was affirmation that the lives they were to lead were different than the lives they thought they had been raised to have. It was assurance that as they lived in between, transitory, transfigured, here they would find God and God would claim us all as God's beloved.