

Sermon for 2017 Yr A Transfiguration  
"Encounters That Change Us"  
Preached Sunday August 6, 2017 at St. James', Mount Vernon  
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My family and I got back last week from a ten-day trip to Japan, our second in two years. Last time we stayed in Tokyo, this time we spent the majority of our time in Kyoto.

It was a really powerful trip, filled with cultural, geographic, and spiritual experiences.

Filled with so much, that I'm not sure how really to talk about it, I mean, to explain what it meant to me.

And perhaps I am a little bit in the situation of Peter, James, and John, coming down off the mountain after seeing the transfigured Jesus... perhaps it is best that I just keep silent.

Big experiences take a lot of processing in order to understand them, in order to make sense of them.

We process by talking, writing, thinking and sharing. The great majority of the time, that processing mostly serves to slot our new experiences into our existing world view.

But some experiences are not meant to fit into our existing categories. Some experiences are meant to change us, to change who we are and how we encounter the world.

And when an experience won't fit into the way that we already understand the world, when we don't have any frame of reference to make sense of what has happened to us, then there is just one path left... the path of silence.

The silence of awe. The silence of mystery. The silence of listening and waiting. The silence of germination, as of a seed in the darkness.

Silence creates a space in our lives that lets something new happen, a fruitful space where we become more than we were.

Peter, James, and John had one of those life-changing experiences while they were up on the mountain with Jesus. When Jesus revealed his glory with Moses and Elijah, Peter tried to fit it all into his old way of understanding, offering to build dwelling places for all three of them. And then the voice of God spoke, telling them to stop and listen.

And so, when they came down off of the mountain, they were silent. Silent. Nothing to say, because they didn't have the words. They were silent while their minds were being rewired, realigned to work in the glory of Jesus.

I like to remember and tell the stories of our trip to Japan, of the amazing places we saw and experiences we had.

But I'm aware of a part of my self is that is silent, where these experiences continue to exercise their power upon me, to change me and to open new as yet unimagined possibilities in my life.

This is true of any encounter with God, with the presence of the Divine.

We most often slot God into our known categories, the familiar ways that explain and contain his power and presence in our lives. And yet God is bigger than what we can imagine, and we are most truly in touch with his reality when we make room for him to change us in ways we can't understand or anticipate.

We can all encounter God in the way that demands silence as the only response... through that silence we may discover who God intends for us to be.

Amen.