

On this last Sunday after Epiphany, we end this season, right where we began, with the words:

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

If you recall, on the first Sunday after Epiphany, these words from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 3, verse 17, were heard from the heavens as Jesus rose up from the water at his Baptism.

Today, we hear these words again (chapter 17, vs 5) emerging from a bright cloud that overshadowed Peter, James, John on the mountaintop.

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!”

Listen to Him!

In just a few days, we will enter into the season of Lent: a period of 40 days and 40 nights, where we have opportunity (a bit like Moses) to be intentional about practices that draw us nearer to God. Before we get to Lent though, it is helpful for us to pause for a moment and bask in the beauty and glory of God.

There's an image in today's Gospel lesson that piqued my curiosity: the bright cloud that overshadows them.

When I picture an overshadowing cloud, my adult brain immediately imagines dark, foreboding clouds that mean: it's time to prepare because a storm is near.

The bright cloud we hear about today however, means something different — it means that the presence of God is near.

As I mentioned a moment ago, on the mountaintop, Peter, James, and John bear witness to the Transfiguration of Jesus, AND they also hear the voice of God emerging from this bright cloud, with these words that echo the moment of Jesus' Baptism.

What a moment of hope, beauty, and glory!

Is it any wonder that Peter wishes to make dwellings, so that they could stay there and live in that moment?

Don't we all long for these kinds of moment ourselves, particularly when the worries and the storms of the world loom large and overshadow us?

As I prayed about this image of a bright cloud that overshadows, it occurred to me, that even though we may never personally experience these kinds of mountain-top moments with God, today is an opportunity for us to consider all the ways that God reveals God-self to us in the ordinary, everyday moments of our lives.

I share my own personal reflections in hopes that you might be inspired to consider how it is that the God of love, peace, and joy comes to you.

Here is my list:

1) The first image that came to mind was one of my favorite past-times as a kid. At the risk of revealing my age, I'll tell you that when I was a teenager, we had three television channels to choose from. In other words, sitting in front of a television for hours wasn't practical, because often, there wasn't anything good to watch! So, we found other things to do. In the summer months, cloud-gazing was one of my favorites. For hours, I would lie in the grass and watch the clouds go by. Amazed by their shapes and form, and the peaceful way they floated on by, I imagined God was painting beautiful pictures for all the world to see.

2) Another of my favorites — even as an adult — was/is gazing at the stars. The vast, beauty of the universe is mind-boggling. Mind you, stargazing has never impressed me from a scientific standpoint, but always

intrigued me from God's perspective, as I wondered: What does all this look like from God's perspective?

3) Walking in a forest of trees is one of the most peaceful, joy-filled, and mystifying experiences. Did you know that trees communicate with one another? Through the underground web of roots, and even across miles with communication through their leaves, trees take care of each other. They send messages of warning, and pleas for assistance, so that they can work together to nurture and support the forest. Surely, that has to be God's handiwork.

4) Sitting beside a body of water. There's always been something mysterious and wonderful about water in motion. Not to mention, it's soothing. Many times I've wondered: how far does one molecule of water travel or what kind of impact might it have? So many living things depend on water...surely God must have known this as He created the life that we know.

5) Speaking of the impact of water...have you ever walked in the quiet, stillness of a snowstorm? As the snowflakes fall and the world seems so still and quiet. The bustle is hushed. Beauty falls from the sky and creates a clean, white blanket of purity and calm.

6) Then, there are the animals. Big ones, little ones, the ones that live in our houses and/or in the barns. The birds, squirrels, and all kinds of wild creatures run about doing whatever it is that wild creatures do. Think of all the living creatures that deliver love in the form of wags, hops, trots, or purrs every moment of any day. The glory of God swirls all around us.

7) Last one to share, and perhaps the most profound for me is the heart of a child. I'm blessed to have had so many opportunities to bear witness to the presence of God in the hearts of children: young and old. Sometimes their innocent words of love and wisdom seem to arrive at the best moments, and are so spot on, that it leaves one to wonder if the inspiration for their words arrived straight from heaven, on the wings of angels.

I could keep going, but you get the idea. Even though we may never have the opportunity to experience the voice of God on the mountaintop to hear the voice of God emerging from the bright cloud as these three disciples did, we all have experiences when God comes to us in the everyday, ordinary, moments of our lives. We simply have to be tuned in and attentive enough to notice the beauty all around us, and to hear God say: "Behold! This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!"

Imagine the goodness and transformation that comes from within us when we intentionally notice, and take the time to behold the beauty and glory that comes to us.

Imagine also the goodness and transformation that is delivered to others when we share this love, joy, and peace with all who have ears to listen!

My friends on this last Sunday after the Epiphany...Imagine! Dream! Behold the bright cloud that overshadows us!

Amen.