

## **Glimpses of the Holy**

2 Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-8

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

February 11, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

Center Church is a “don’t just stand there, do something!” kind of place. We have lots going on, and we do so much for so many with so few people that it is just amazing and wonderful and faithful.

But here’s a funny thing, a God-blessing thing. We worship in a building that is a “don’t just do something, stand there,” kind of place. Did you get the change there? It’s a line from Alice in Wonderland. “Don’t just do something, stand there.” We come into this place, and it is just so darn beautiful. Look around you. Look at windows, think about how the music sounds here, look at the architecture. I could sit and look at this angel over here for hours and not tire of her.

Churches in many Christian traditions were often designed and built to be utterly gorgeous for a reason. We are meant to dwell when we worship in the presence of wonder, of holy, of joy. We’re meant to set some time apart from the down and dirty of the world to be in a place and time of wonder, and therefore, remember how utterly fantastic God is. It helps us let go of whatever is not beautiful in our lives and attend to what is. It gives us perspective, direction, and hope. It helps us imagine that a beautiful and holy world is there, just under the surface of struggle, and so be moved to uncover it everywhere.

That’s what Jesus was up to by bringing three disciples along for this magical, mystical encounter with prophets long gone, and a moment of exposing the power in Jesus in a new way. He was “transfigured,” in other words, the divine glory that dwelt in him came through his crude human flesh, the glory was uncovered, and the disciples got just a glimpse of the divine inside of Jesus. It was a moment for them to be silent in wonder and awe and thanks, and open themselves to the holy all around them, letting go of the fears and pain of the world.

But Peter was a “don’t just stand there, do something” kind of guy. Fear and confusion mixed in with the wonder for him, and he interrupted the moment with unnecessary human speech. “Let’s do something!” Like when we are standing somewhere in nature that is utterly gorgeous and all around us people are hauling out cell phones to capture the moment in pictures instead of immersing themselves in the wonder of it. Breathing in the glory of God.

What Peter did not yet fully grasp was that things in his world were about to get very, very bad. It would not be long before Jesus was arrested, the disciples had to flee for their lives, and Jesus would be tortured and killed. What Peter did not fully grasp was that Jesus called him up that mountain so that he could see that God had moved in the history of Peter’s people, in the tough times of Elijah and Moses, and that God still held power, strength, and the ability to move in human beings like Peter in redemptive ways.

So, God spoke, which shut Peter up really fast! I wonder how that voice manifested. You know in the movies, God’s voice is always someone like Morgan Freeman, a deep booming bass. Did God sound scary? “**THIS IS MY SON! THE BELOVED! LISTEN TO HIM!!!**” Or was it gentler? “*this is my son, my beloved. Oh, listen to him.*” Either way, the message was clear. There is a time for doing something. There is a time for standing there, and listening to Jesus.

My mother likes to sing an old hymn. “Take time to be holy,” we sang, “speak oft with the Lord.” I might change the words to “Take time to be holy, **listen** oft with the Lord.” If we don’t do that, we burn out in all our doing something. If we don’t breathe in the Spirit, we don’t have enough breath to do justice and love kindness, and we don’t have the direction we need to know how to do it best. This is Jesus. Listen to him.

One of my favorite musicals is *Hairspray*, and one of my favorite lines comes in the voice of Motormouth Maybelle. The story takes place in the 1960’s, and as she looks at two teenagers in love, one white and

one black, she tells them that they need to prepare for "a whole lotta ugly coming at you from a never-ending parade of stupid." Too often that feels like the world we are living in. Certainly, Jesus experienced that. After coming down the mountain, he encountered incompetent disciples who gave up trying to heal a child. He shouted, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?" But, then he healed the child and comforted his bumbling followers by saying that, yes, this was a challenging case. And he went on loving, feeding, healing, teaching. Peter, James and John did, too, drawing strength from this vision of power they had been privileged to experience.

Today, as you saw, we are putting away the word, "Alleluia" from our worship services from now to Easter. "Alleluia" is an untranslatable word which is an expression of that wonder, that "Ahhh," "Ahh-le-lu-ia," that exhilaration of being in the presence of the holy. During Lent, we get down and dirty with Jesus off the mountain, remembering for six weeks the struggle and challenge of his life, and of ours. But we are holding on to the word in secret here, holding it close to our hearts for courage and hope and vision. Easter will come, like a booster shot of wonder and joy to carry us through and above the ugly coming at us from a never-ending parade of stupid.

For the rest of the service today, though, I invite you, "don't just do something, stand there." Take in all of the holy that you can in whatever way it comes. Breathe in the Spirit around you. Sing Alleluia Listen to Jesus. Amen.