

I've heard it said you **can** pray anywhere, if you have to.

Jesus didn't leave it at that.

Didn't neglect opportunities to pray in and with very diverse environments, and company.

In this story, Jesus leads his friends into the extreme environment of "the" mountain.

Which is also a community of sorts.

Just as, in a local church setting, we pray in partnership with the people around us, so today, fellow creatures and the Earth's own self can finally play their part in whatever this prayer business may be, which is certainly not exhausted by the spoken or printed word.

The theme of walking humbly also makes a lot of sense: Approach the unforgiving immensity of a mountain with anything other than the respectful humility due a fellow worshipper, and you won't last long.

It's arrogance as well as ignorance that leads to call-outs for the mountain rescue volunteers: not heeding the weather, not reading the signs of crisis already under way. Neglecting the

shouting of the stones in the face of the silence of disciples, for which, since Christ is long since risen, we have no remaining excuse.

In that other wilderness, when Jesus was tempted to walk with entitlement, he discovered that without constant vigilance on mountain paths, angels or no angels, striking your foot against a stone will be the least of your worries.

Because however many sticks boots ropes helmets or goggles you surround yourself with, a walk up a mountain is always a walk in vulnerability, reliant on grace, exposed, beyond immediate help.

But I'm reminded of the story of the wizard of Oz when Dorothy and her friends are conned into wearing goggles to shield their eyes from a non-existent glare.

It's something like those inappropriately protective glasses that lead us to See Earth as our property, or even a disposable gift, rather than a living partner, a beloved family member, a ruler, on whom we depend. Looking creation in the face, letting them look back at you, can dazzle and inspire awe. There's something of

glory in each sunrise and set. And some fellow humans, whose hitherto marginalised and despised voices began to be heard in Glasgow at COP, are content to live already in that dazzling glare of constant and conscious relationship with Creation.

In Luke's version of the story: up on the mountain, as he prayed, the face of Jesus looked different.

What he was "for his friends" changed.

But also, much more significantly, what they were to him. No longer followers, but partners, and no longer mere partners, but confidants.

With all excuse gone for ignoring the warnings and the guidance that Jesus gives.

On the way up, let's grasp, before we go further,

the way Luke puts it:

neither Jesus, nor his face were changed,

but in the extreme environment in which he entered into prayer, he **looked** different.

Just as the whole landscape begins to look different up here....

We see... the reality of here and now, from a different camera angle, which complements the mental map we need to find our place and purpose.

Not changing the world, but changing our view of it, so that our attitudes, actions, relationships may themselves evolve.

What the disciples were privileged to see of Jesus was far **more** than they were ready for;

What we seem hell-bent on blinkering ourselves into, is far **less than we're called to as human beings. Or as church, bringing Good News to every Creature.**

So maybe there are some things we should risk being dazzled by, overwhelmed by.

The power word for me, in this story, is 'dazzling'. It's a scary word: with tones of overload, deception, even despair.

There have been a few times up hills when this began to make experiential sense: Clouds and wind and rain, and even white-out . Other bells ring too, in different disciplines and cultures.

When Jesus' clothes become white, northern Europeans think purity and holiness. Scientists demonstrate that what the experience of white includes the diversity of the spectrum of light. A photographer would say we've blown our highlights, but white, which is at once a superfluity and an absence of colour comes together with a far more powerful detail: that of dazzling.

Now, In local ministry, wrestling with the rather odd story of Transfiguration, I've been up many and various hills in pursuit of this story....and a few blind alleys into the bargain.

All sorts of strategies to protect us from how this story might change the way we look both to others and ourselves :

There's the minimising approach. An undemanding stroll up a gentle hill. There's the "oh it's just a metaphor really" approach, though metaphor works powerfully by its rootedness in real experience.

There's even the spiritualising approach: in a sealed laboratory of spirituality, Jesus gives disciples a glimpse of the hidden heavenly reality of who he is, far beyond what we have a right to grasp. A humility, with no benefit to all those fellow creatures to whom we're called to bring and to be good news.

This is a story in which Jesus himself reminds us that journeys require us to get out of the car-park. Not just box-tick transfiguration off the Christian year as we dash on to more chocolate-filled festivals.

Though the car park is where I've seen friends give up and leave this very odd story to the scripture nerds who imprison it in the barbed wire of exclusivity woven from every esoteric

detail or scholarly significance you can cram into it, whether from Jesus's own first-century Judaism or from our own very specific cultures, passed off as definitive.

Like those who, not content with an ancient monastery on Mount Tabor, insisted bigger is better and the Mount of Transfiguration demanded a more majestic altitude.

But whatever the mountain those four friends climbed, be it Tabor, Hermon, or any other pretender, you and I **will** hear the tale, process it, be moved by it very differently

when we bring it together with our own concrete experiences of hills and mountains, than if we're just sitting reading.

Location, whether actual or imagined, physical or vicarious, is never neutral.

Come with me today up even this very modest mountain, and our journey **will be** different in content and insights from if I'd stayed in the study with a webcam and a very nice microphone.

We will look differently and we will look different.

And so might Jesus.

On this path, amidst talk of something so deceptively commonplace in our mountains as clouds and glorious light, and indeed of the way that strangers just appear, when we thought we'd got the whole world to ourselves ... but there they are. Following that African proverb: that to get lost is to learn the way...

Why when we hear of “miracle” - meaning, something which makes visible God at work - why do we insist it's something un-earthly, something that breaks the laws of nature, rather than stretching the boundaries of our own oh-so-narrow vision.

There are so many wonderful birds, insects and more even in Scotland, that I've never come face to face with. But with or without me, they live and breathe as I do, and we're discovering more and more how we depend on each other.

For a God who's incarnate in the earthiness of the Earth demands more than a god safely locked up in a hygienically distant heaven,

There are More things in sky and soil than we dream of....but all of them fellow creatures of our sustaining God.

Now, for my own part, I have no interest in explaining this story away, or making any arrogant claims that “this is exactly what happened, or how”, but what I can do is encourage us to experience it rather than just hear or read it.

Embracing and respecting its record of mystery, so that, rather than passively *taking* things as they come, we actively *deal* with them, as they come.

I’d like to suggest, following a close reading of the text, that the men on the mountain “became, for Peter James and John, Elijah and Moses.”

Lest we lose sight of this, both Moses and Elijah are partners with God, rather than heroes in their own right. Their authority came from their response, their real-world intervention facilitated by more than their own interest. Yet for the disciples, they

located Christ's life and mission in the mainstream of what mattered to them.

So who it is that we might need to see, in the clouds and the dazzling of glory. Giving and receiving the authentication of Christ. Who it is we might need to see when we're dazzled and overloaded by what we've heard about climate, extinction, the oceans, and more?

Last year I squinted through the glory and saw, perhaps, Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough: prophets young and old, though now even they might be too reassuring.

The prophetic voice of our day, indeed, says 'I want you to panic'. It's the authority of 'common sense' or 'being sensible' or 'slow us down, Lord' that by the disregard of vision, invites the perishing of the planet .

After COP, maybe still Greta, but also those indigenous people I heard there: guardians of the world's biodiversity, and of the wisdom of a vulnerable relationship with a holy and living planet, way beyond the shelters of

mere stewardship that our churches, like Peter, still still seem content to build, as if what science has shown us, of the injustice which causes crisis, required no more than to muster our treasures and traditions without environmental conversion, recycling, repurposing, reshaping, though like the cloud, time moves on. Leaving us behind.

Or maybe, more dazzling still, we look over and see, talking with Christ about what it might take to heal the world, ourselves, who have a part to play.

What if it was myself I saw there?

What if it was yourself that you saw?

After all, it was his friends that Jesus took with him.....why not us?

Because after COP 26, which hasn't done it all for us, the part we have to play in that healing matters all the more.

But then we'll hear the Voice, which commands - or is it implores - disciples like us to **take some notice**. As the clouds dance around the mountain, concealing, revealing. The clouds of those heavens, those skies, which, as climate

does change, are loving us with warnings like the warnings that make up so much of the teachings of Jesus and of the New testament letters.

Revealing and concealing with God's help, what it is that we need to take notice of:

The good news that a just transition to a sustainable life is likely to be a better and a happier one too.

And then we remember that Jesus spoke also to trees and seas; to life and death. His conversation was with those whose voices, both human and non-human, we ignore and disregard at our peril, those voices whom both through science and the delightful experience of the life of the World, we welcome, respect, honour, acknowledge, partner with, and maybe, even.... obey.