

## "Things That Happen On Mountaintops"

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Who shall we trust – science or The Sacred?

For the last two we have been living with science. Our political leaders have been clear throughout this Covid Pandemic: we yield to science. They tell us what to do and how we shall live. We look to science to answer our questions, to solve our problems, to explain our world. And I, for one, am glad that we have come to look to science and not to magic or speculation to answer our questions about the natural world. We have all benefited from the answers that science can find and has found. Like many of you, I am still living and able to get around because of scientific formulas like antibiotics and medical advances.

Of course, our reliance on science comes with a price. Mark Twain once wrote: "We have not the reverent feeling for the rainbow that the savage has, because we know how it is made. We have lost as much as we gained by prying into that matter."

I can't quite remember who it was who said it but I was attending an event Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia and we had all just watched the historic "Landing On The Moon". It was on a late summer night in 1969 after Neil Armstrong had set foot on the moon, when someone said: "We'll never look at it in such wonder again."

But as a good scientist will tell you, that's about all science can do. It can tell us *how*, but not--in the largest sense--*why*. Here's an example: Earlier this month was Valentine's Day. Now science can explain why most men are attracted to women and vice versa. It's an evolutionary, biological, hard-wired need to preserve the species perhaps. Or it's hormones. Or it's a psychological predisposition. Or it's social or cultural training. Or it's some combination of those realities.

Science can explain sensual/sexual attraction. It can explain why a handsome young man and a beautiful, healthy woman of reproductive age seek each other out and court and reproduce. Science can explain *attraction*, but science can't explain *love*.

Science can't explain why, for example, forty years later--not as healthy, not as good-looking and far beyond reproductive age--that same man sits by the hospital bed of that same woman night, after night holding her hand, praying that she survives cancer, willing, in a second, to change places with her, to die if it would mean that she might live.

Science can measure and study and explain the need of a species to reproduce itself and survive. But science can't explain love. And, yet, love is as *real* as reproduction. It is as *real* as it is *unexplainable*. Down through the centuries, human love has remained a mystery that lies beneath what we can evaluate and measure and see.

What happened on the Mount of Transfiguration in today's Gospel reading was something like that, it seems to me. It wasn't science. It was the sacred and I realize to try to explain it is futile. Peter and James and John had known Jesus well for a long time. And since they were willing to leave their livelihoods and follow him, they obviously thought highly of Jesus and of his teaching. They considered him to be a remarkable rabbi. They had recently even come to see Jesus as the promised messiah--the one God had chosen to lead Israel.

Still, to these followers, Jesus was a man, just a man--a singularly inspiring teacher, perhaps a great leader who might help his people kick the Romans out of power and take control of their own affairs again--but a human being to be sure.

Then, suddenly, on the mountain, for just a moment, they are able see beneath Jesus' ordinary humanity and find shining there the very *presence*, the very *holiness*, the very *glory* of God. It is revelation. It is mystery, which can be neither explained nor debunked. Like true love, it is a reality too deep to measure.

Indeed, the Biblical witness over and over again is that there is a hidden holiness which exists "*in, with and under*" ordinary things and ordinary people. Water, wine, bread--it is these ordinary things that God has chosen to make holy for us. A group of ordinary people gathered worship is a gathering of ordinary human beings, in the grace

of God, becomes the very body of Christ, the incarnate One, in all its mystery and holiness.

The job of science is to *remove* the mystery from the world. The job of the sacred is to *show* us the holy mystery hiding everywhere.

You probably remember when, in the climactic scene of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her companions pull back the curtain to reveal the "Magnificent Oz" to be a very ordinary human being. Rather than a powerful and terrible wizard, he is only an old man with a lot of technology at his disposal. *That's science*, debunking the pretense of the great wizard. And, yet, you also remember that this pretender turned out, in fact, to be able to give each of the seekers *exactly* what he or she needed-- *courage, a heart, a brain, a home*. That's not science. That's *the work of The Sacred*: seeing the possibilities that lie beneath what seems ordinary.

Which brings us to Lent, which begins Ash Wednesday. If we pay attention, we might come to see that *our communities* are holy. We might come to know that our *world* is holy, that God permeates every inch of it. We might come to know that *we* are holy, that God dwells not in *Cathedrals* but in *us*. We might come to know that our *neighbor* is holy, the place where we are most likely to meet and to serve the Mysterious and Holy Incarnate One. All so common but at the same time Sacred.

Let us pray. Grant us eyes to see your holiness all around us in ourselves, in our communities, in our world, in our neighbors, through Christ our Lord. Amen.