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The Feast of the Transfiguration
The Community of the Transfiguration
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They were never meant to stay there, up on that mountain.

He woke them up early, before dawn. Peter and John and James were each still in their tents, but they paid attention when he roused them. They rubbed the sleep from their eyes, threw their robes over their heads, slipped their feet into the sandals that waited by the doorway.

They hadn't had anything to eat yet, but they were too tired still to be hungry. So they followed him, as they always did, trying and trying to keep up.

He knew the trail to the mountain, past the caves at its base. The sheep were still tucked in safely behind their shepherds, behind the gates in the field. They walked past, as quietly as they could, avoiding the rocks and the brush, putting their feet where they thought they had seen his.

The sun was just cracking the horizon as they found the trail up the mountain. It was narrow, as the path there had been. But at least they could see him, now. At least they could follow without stumbling.

It was steeper than they realized, when they'd looked up before from below, at a distance. Now that they were actually climbing this mountain, it was a series of back and forth across its face, because it was too much to just go straight up. So they walked across the face, followed the trail as it switched back in the other direction a few steps higher. And again. And again. And still again.

By the time they got to the top, they'd forgotten how many times they'd crossed over and back. It seemed like they would never get there. But now they were dizzy from the hike and the view. They looked down and the

village seemed tiny. The sea, not nearly as big as it felt when they last set out on their boat.

There was water, thank God, and a little food that he'd brought for them. They drank and ate quietly, relieved after the journey.

And then they found their places - a rock to lean against, a space of grass, a log at just the right height. He went off a little ways away in the clearing, and the rest of them found their places, settled themselves, and began to pray.

They didn't know how long it had been - a minute, or an hour, or longer, or less - but suddenly everything was different.

He was praying. They all were praying, that's why he'd woken them up, that's why they'd stumbled along in the dark, that's why they had followed the trail back and forth and up and back and forth and up...and up and up and up.

They had prayed with him before, many times before, but this time was different. This time, his face changed. And his clothes changed. This light...he was so bright that it was hard to even look at him.

And then it wasn't just him, but there were others there too - Moses, and Elijah. He was talking with them, and they answered. They said something about him leaving them, at Jerusalem. And there was no word for what they were seeing...this shining, brilliant moment...no word for it but glory.

And they were tired - it had been so early, and they'd walked so far, and now this...this...they were exhausted, but they could not look away, but they could hardly stay awake...but the only word for this moment in its brilliance and shining beauty, the only word was glory.

Peter, though - Peter, being Peter, had several words. The other two were leaving, but Peter said, "Wait! It is good for us to be here!" So many words,

he had. He didn't know. "It is good for us to be here," he said, "Let's make three dwelling places, one for each of you..."

And then there was a cloud, but it was bright. And none of this made sense. They could not see. They could not see. They could not see, and they were terrified. They could not see, but they could hear.

And the voice that they could hear said, "This is my Son. This is my Chosen. Listen! Listen to him."

And then the cloud was gone. And it was the three of them, again, with him alone.

They were never meant to stay there, on that mountain.

They were quiet, afterwards. They didn't say anything. They looked at each other, and they looked at him.

After a time, he stood up and started walking toward the trail. They followed, because it was him - because that was what they knew how to do. So they put their feet where they'd seen his land, a few steps ahead. They leaned back and took smaller steps, when the descent was steep. They walked across the face of the mountain, took a couple of steep steps down, walked across again in the other direction.

They didn't talk about it, though. They didn't tell anybody what they'd seen, what they'd heard. How could they explain it? The long walk up would've been fine to share, the view from the top once they got there. But the brightness of his face, and his clothes, and Moses and Elijah, and the cloud, and the voice...

No. They didn't share that. They didn't tell anybody. Not for a long, long time.

He was changed, from that point onward. But so were they. They were never meant to stay there on that mountain, but something was different, for him and for them, when they came down from it.

They were changed. They had heard that voice in the cloud, and they listened - even Peter did. They listened to what he said. They listened to him preach. They listened to his teaching - whether it was just to them, or to the twelve, or to the crowds. They had seen something they couldn't not see, heard something they could not explain. And they were different, because of it.

They went back to their tents and their work, to the teaching and the preaching and the following and the leading. They watched him heal people - even on the sabbath. They heard the parables, differently now. They listened to him talk about what it costs to be a disciple; a cost they knew.

We, too, are called to listen, and to follow. We, too, are changed, as we find our way down the steep pathways and back to the places in which God calls us to minister.

We, too, are called to find words for a miracle which transfigures, one that transcends our understanding.