

Given the choice,  
 I'd rather be a member of Moses' crew in Deuteronomy  
 than in Jesus' group in Matthew's gospel.  
 Because when Moses and Joshua set forth up the mountain,  
 the plan is clear:  
 The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain,  
 and wait there;  
 and I will give you tablets of stone,  
 with the law and the commandment,  
 which I have written for [the people's] instruction."

It's a clearly laid plan:  
 Go up the mountain.  
 Be prepared to wait.  
 You'll leave with tablets and law, for instruction.

We can guess that Moses shared the LORD's information  
 with Joshua, his assistant, who accompanies him.  
 And because he knows they'll have to *wait* on top of the mountain,  
 Moses even knows to inform the elders about what's going to happen:  
 "To the elders, he said, 'Wait here for us . . .  
 Aaron and Hue are with you.'"  
 They're the ones he leaves in charge.

Everyone in Moses' crew knows what to expect  
 during this trek up the mountain.

Lucky them!  
 Because thousands of years later  
 when Jesus and his disciples embark upon a *very similar*  
 mountain climbing expedition  
 they get no idea what to expect!

Seemingly out of the blue,  
 Jesus selects three of the twelve disciples—  
 taking Peter and James and John—  
 and leads them up a high mountain.  
 Unlike the LORD did for Moses,

Jesus does not invite them to come up and wait;  
 he does not tell them why they're going up  
 nor what they will receive from the journey.  
 And meanwhile, to the nine disciples left behind,  
 Jesus says nothing.  
 He does not tell them what he and the other three are going to do,  
 says nothing about if or how long they'll have to wait,  
 and leaves no one in charge in case an inevitable dispute arises.

THIS is when everything glows brightly!  
 In the midst of all this unknown and unknowing,  
 Jesus is transfigured before them!  
 His face shines like the sun.  
 His clothes become dazzling white.  
 People who lived hundreds of years ago appear with them,  
 talking to Jesus!  
 And while Peter is suggesting building huts  
     to make sense of this craziness,  
 a bright cloud overshadows them,  
 and a voice from the cloud bellows,  
 "This is my Son, the Beloved;  
 with him I am well pleased."

The voice is the first thing that would have been familiar  
 to the three disciples,  
 for this *same* voice that spoke and said the *same* phrase  
 at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.  
 The only thing they have in their experience  
 that connects to this mountain top moment is Jesus' baptism.  
 But the voice adds something new this time:  
 "Listen to him."

All this caught the disciples off guard,  
 because when they heard this,  
 they fell to the ground and were overcome  
 by fear.  
 And fear is a perfectly understandable response  
 to anyone in the situation:

Up alone on a mountain without their friends  
 and with no inkling of why they're there;  
 their boss glowing with blinding light before their eyes;  
 the ancestors of their faith appearing with him;  
 God's booming voice from the cloud saying more than God said before.

It's all rather unpredictable. Unanticipated. Territory of the unknown.  
 Sure, the disciples felt Jesus' call and allure while fishing beside the sea.  
 Yes, they've seen Jesus heal paralytics  
 and cast out demons.  
 They've heard him speak of his being the Son of God  
 and of his impending death and resurrection.  
 Since they started following Jesus—which itself was unexpected—  
 it's been one unexpected thing after another.  
 The Transfiguration is just  
 the next next-level.

\*

We can surely relate to the disciples.  
 For all of us who tend to like a clearly-laid-out plan  
 this situation produces incredible anxiety!  
 Because Jesus is pulling them,  
 both those on the mountain and those left down below,  
 into the unknown.  
 And who likes being pulled into the unknown?

And as much as we love to say, "God has a plan,"  
 and "It's all according to God's plan,"  
 this story in Holy Scripture testifies to the fact  
 that we do not get to know God's plan.  
 God rarely tells it to us clearly, like God does for Moses.  
 Instead we're just walking up the mountain  
 or chilling in the group below  
 without knowing what comes next.

In our lives of faith,  
 it's more like we're walking through the middle of the night,

than in the light of the midday sun.  
We Christians follow Jesus into the unknown.

And that, my friends, is actually good news.  
Because we're *following* Jesus.  
Christ is going first.  
Christ is going with us.  
And Christ will return to us.

So we can go into the unknown free from fear and anxiety  
because there won't be anything Christ can't redeem us from.  
There is no situation too messy,  
sin too bad,  
grief too deep,  
that Christ cannot save us from.  
Whenever or whatever dark clouds surrounds us,  
Jesus promises to shine brightly.

After all, it's at the *height* of the disciples' unknowing  
that Jesus is transfigured.  
It's in the darkness that God creates the light.  
It's from the suffering of the cross  
that Christ births new life.

AMEN.