

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain...” Mark 9.2

I know a mountain so full of wonder that few can see it. I'd like to take you there today; perhaps, together, we might see something wonderful. It's in that great and mountainous state of Indiana – Roachdale, Indiana to be exact. Not exactly the place I'd want to be from either. With a name like that, I thank God, I'm not. But growing up in the Midwest, some of my greatest memories are filled with landscapes from Roachdale; images of the alternating greens and browns of vast corn fields. It is the legacy of my grandparents and their farm.

My childhood runs deep with memories of changing seasons, harvesting soybean and corn; even to this day, as I stand here, I can remember the moist, cool, dark smell of Indiana soil or the thick red clay that would cake on my shoes after an early morning walk. But there is no memory more soothing to me than the smell of freshly cut hay, left to dry in the summer sun; that sweet smelling grass, the smell of green lingered all day—into the evening breeze that wrapped around the porch of the Civil War era home. For me, there is one farm—the farm, in Roachdale, Indiana.

But there is another side that I did not see. It was the metallic smell of engine grease, the burning touch of 4 am winter winds, the taste of salt on a man's brow. The life of a farmer is a life of scarcity and playing-the-odds, hoping and praying that the earth will give forth so that money borrowed will not turn to a thing of bitterness. Men and women of the plough are a unique folk; they know life and the fruit of the soil in ways many of us can only imagine. To this day, my grandfather does not eat corn; I don't know what he tastes. Maybe it is the sweat, maybe the blood that he has put into the harvest.

The truth is: It depends upon what we see, what we know as our realities that determine such things. And so I ask: What do we see? The memories of my grandparents' farm stay with me. In particular, the south pasture, where my brother and I, underneath the sound of crickets and the smell of cattle, would camp out on the side of our mountain.

The south pasture was an undulating plot of land, at its bottom, a winding creek, overshadowed by scraggly hillsides covered in crab-apple trees and thorn bushes. There was little grass to hold up the eroding dirt due to the grazing cattle and the continual descent of the herd moving down into the gully to drink. For any other eyes, it was an uninviting sight of browns and grays and blacks, something more akin to an Edgar Allen Poe poem, not the anticipation of an eight-year-old boy and his brother as they sat in a car traveling to the family farm.

But I saw something different. My brother and I saw something different, something special; something that will stay with me, be a part of me, until I leave this earth.

As we made our way south to Roachdale, my brother, J.D., and I would scheme about what we would take on our journey to the south pasture, what we would eat and do, who would set up the tent, or start the fire for our night on the mountain. Indeed, it wasn't exactly a mountain, but to two young boys, it was the closest thing we knew. That mountain, filled with thorny bushes and briars, was a place of wonder.

A place that J.D. and I would talk about nothing and everything, a place of our own, where we ate Grandma's stash of moonpies she thought was hidden well enough to evade little hands or mac n' cheese with hot-dog pieces our mom had made earlier in the day. Everything we needed was wrapped up in a towel, tied to the end of a stick, and carried over our shoulders. We wanted to fulfill every imagination of ours.

Every time we went to the mountain, we felt like kings, as if our imagination alone was the hindrance to uncharted places. Now, we never stayed out the whole night. Too scared by the heavy sounds of nearby cattle, the dark light of the moon, the absence of mom and dad; we were brave, but not brave enough to stay,

to believe that we could stay on the mountain. We saw something different in that hillside. A place that, to any other eye, was a simple pasture, beaten down by grazing livestock. Quite unspectacular, quite unimportant.

But for me and my brother, it was a place of wonder and imagination. And today, when I travel back to the family farm, it is difficult to imagine the little boy that found another world, another option, something majestically different and glorious in what really is like any other pasture in central Indiana.

But there are things on that “mountain,” there are memories that few others know, no one else saw; there are parts of my world on that hillside that only my brother and I know. To this day, my mom still says, she never could figure out why we loved that ugly hillside so much, especially when we always left it before night’s end.

But here is the answer. Here is the truth: We saw something different. Something that changed us every time, something that drew us back every time we went to the farm; perhaps, it is forever lost to that eight year old boy and his big brother.

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.” Mark 9.2

There is a part of me that understands Jesus’ command to tell no one about what they had seen. Who could understand what Peter, James, and John saw on that mountain? Who would believe the glory of this man, Jesus? His face shining like the sun, like the patriarch Moses—who would believe what they saw?

Do we believe that Jesus was transfigured, changed? And into what? Something new, something different? This is what Mark is telling us—there is a glory, a divinity, a majesty, an unknown reality of Jesus that is revealed to those who would see anew. And this vision, this sight, makes all things new.

Peter, James and John saw something no other eyes were blessed to see. And after it was over—after the voice spoke to them so clearly—“they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.” Only Jesus. What a blessed sight. Had it truly happened?

I cannot help but wonder if Peter, after denying Jesus, as he escaped to wherever it was that he ran from the crowd, if he was not burning with a passion to go back to that mountain. To scramble up that hillside, alone, tears flowing from his eyes, to see if there was any sign of that wonder, that unimaginable sight that he had recently denied. The transfiguration of Jesus upon that high mountain is only a part of the faith, as Peter’s life shows us. But it is a constant question to all of us that proclaim faith in Christ, as it is a question for the world. In Jesus Christ, what do we see? How has the glory of Jesus transfigured/transformed us—known to us in this place, in this community, at Christ & Holy Trinity, the relationships we hold, our very lives.

This vision of Jesus, which we are called to see with our souls, summons us to our own transfiguration. Indeed, such a transformation, the very work we are called to as Church may seem unbelievable, unimaginable to this world, but it is a love and life together; as we baptize Lia Vanessa today, we will experience and know this unimaginable work of the church—that we are called to love and support her; indeed, that we are knit together as a family in Christ. Truly, this is as glorious as that vision upon a mountain so long ago.

In Jesus’ transfiguration we see the Christ, the very God that loves beyond life, that invites us to a life of unbounded and unimaginable grace; and, if we are brave enough—God calls us to remain in that cloud of wonder by giving ourselves to our God, calling us out from ourselves, down from the mountain, toward one another, as we hear God’s gentle words, calming our fears, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”