

In the late 1980's England was stricken by a serious drought. A country accustomed to having plenty of rainfall had its water supply reduced because of a change in the flow of the tides for over a year. During that time the government met in London and enacted legislation to reduce water consumption throughout the nation. A Water Commission was established to research the problem and to make recommendations. Hydrologists were hired to study the impact on farming and on water pollution. About the same time a drought struck East Africa. President Moi in Kenya did what many of the leaders of the other African nations did; he called the Parliament into session and asked that everyone be in prayer for the drought to end. Notices were sent throughout the land to churches and Mosques asking that there be a time of prayer for rain. The following year the drought ended in both countries. (pause)

What makes sense to us, what works for us, is usually a question of where we spend most of our time. Those of us with a western, scientific mindset probably lean toward the British response to the drought. Those who have spent time in places where the spiritual nature of a person was stressed probably feel more comfortable with the approach of the Africans. Emily Dickinson put it well when she wrote,

"Faith is a fine invention, for those of us who see. But microscopes are prudent in an emergency."

Today's lessons challenge us to allow the spiritual dimension of our lives to come forth, to see words like grace and forgiveness and compassion as being more powerful than the principalities and powers of this world. They challenge us to consider how and where two worlds merge--the world of the God we profess to know, and the so-called "real" world in which we live.

The scriptures both told of individuals who were given life-changing experiences of God. Moses went up on the mountain to talk with God. Later in Exodus, when he came down from his second time of being on the mountaintop, the Bible says that his skin shone with new light because of his encounter. Then the people were afraid to be near Moses, because of the strange power produced by his time with God. Centuries later, Jesus took three of his disciples up on a mountain to pray, and something else very powerful happened. We call it "the Transfiguration" today, because Jesus was seen by them in a new way while they were there. As he was praying, Jesus was changed. Moses and Elijah came to be with him, and they spoke of the glory he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. There was power in the entire experience. And later, though the disciples didn't seem to grasp the importance of what they were experiencing at the time, they were able to look back and let it help put everything into perspective.

About a week prior to the mountaintop experience, Jesus had asked his disciples the big question for anyone following him: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter had blurted out, "You are the Messiah of God." Jesus had gone on to warn them that he was not the Messiah the way they had been led to expect. His way was going to take him into confrontation with the authorities, and he would be killed. Jesus even told them that he would be "raised on the third day," but the disciples had trouble understanding what he was saying. None of the disciples said, "Hey, Jesus, wait a minute. I don't

understand. Explain it to me." Instead, it seemed to go right over their heads. Perhaps they didn't WANT to understand.

At any rate, days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up there to the mountaintop. Perhaps he wanted to give them something to help them get through the hard times ahead. Consider what happened up there. The heavens opened and the disciples were allowed to view an entirely new dimension of reality. Heroes of Israel's past, Moses (Law) and Elijah (Prophets), stood with Jesus as Jesus' power was made evident. Peter had earlier declared that Jesus was the Messiah; up on the mountain he got to SEE that Jesus was the Messiah.

Peter knew SOMETHING was expected of him then, so he set out to do what he could think to do - build some dwellings, preserve the moment.... But a voice came out of the cloud and declared of Jesus, "This is my son, my Chosen. Listen to him!" Then there was only Jesus, and the disciples, and silence. (pause)

Every year, we read/hear about this mountaintop experience. Even after they shared in it, Peter, James and John didn't seem to "get" it. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he would disappoint everybody who wanted the Messiah to make a huge show of power and throw out all the occupying Romans and lift up Israel to its past glory. Instead, Jesus would allow himself to be abused by the religious authorities and the Roman authorities, and he would endure what none of us wants to have to go through: being misunderstood and abandoned by those closest to him. Peter, James and John had opportunity the other disciples did not, that experience on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah and Moses, but they still messed up when it came to walking with Jesus to the Cross. They let him down.

Prayer was what kept Jesus aligned with the will of God through it all. Prayer is what gave him the strength to walk in a way that upset the powers-that-be so profoundly and got Jesus killed. Prayer.

When Moses went up on the mountain centuries before Jesus, he did not rush up there, grab the tablets containing the Ten Commandments, and then rush down, the way we tend to approach our tasks these days. Instead, he went up the mountain and stayed there for a long time, some forty days, which gave the people below a lot of concern. During that time with God, Moses received strength that saw him through all that was coming. It was the same for Jesus and his disciples; even though Peter wanted to hurry things along with his Type-A "Let's do something!", Jesus did not hurry. He was strengthened and guided for the long road to Jerusalem where he would give up his life on a cross.

Richard Rohr offered a beautiful description of prayer as he sought to explain why persons who pray are so often seen as a threat to people who hold political power. He spoke of the progression that occurs in prayer: "To pray is, first, to build your own house. Then to pray is to discover that someone else is within your house. Continuing to pray, one realizes that the house does not really belong to them. Praying further, one realizes that they no longer have to protect the house, because there is really only one big house. Finally, it is in prayer that one begins to realize the truth, that the one house is everybody's home. That is the politics of prayer, and that is probably why spiritual people are always a threat to those who hold political power. Those in power call for our allegiance, but it can no

longer be given, because our house is too big." - "Prayer as a Political Activity," quoted by Walter Wink in *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Fortress, 1992)

Transfiguration. It happens when we see something or someone differently. Many of us have met some person who seemed very normal and perhaps uninspiring UNTIL that person became different for us. Maybe an acquaintance who reached out to you when you were hurting, and you saw the person with new eyes. Perhaps someone who seemed very shy, until you heard him sing and found yourself awed by his talent that you had not recognized before. A child who seemed so ordinary, but then who grew up to be exceptional. Our eyes are opened and we see the person in new light.

That's part of what's involved in prayer. We pray so that our eyes can start to see what it is God has for us to see. God can provide a new perspective. God can change us by allowing us to see and experience a different reality--a bigger house, a larger reality. This kind of prayer becomes power-prayer.. Life will still be hard; our hearts will break over and over again as our years increase; but we will be different. This is what Jesus struggled to make the disciples understand, that it was not in the world, but in them, that the change would occur. They would learn to respond to the world's evil with good--a slap on the face was not a reason to strike back, but an opportunity to show the power of good in response to evil. The revelation of other people's failures and sins was not a time for condemnation but for the transforming power forgiveness.

These powers exist to transform our lives as well. We are a world desperately in need of transformation. We are people desperately in need of transformation--we struggle with realities that overwhelm us--illness, financial difficulties, the breakup of relationships, the disappointing ways in which life has turned out for us--our lives move inevitably toward death.

Our world is full of droughts - droughts and challenges of all sorts and durations. Various aspects of "reality" close in on us and invite us to despair or panic. God would have us go up on the mountain (figuratively) to spend some time with a different reality. Then we'll see what God has created our eyes to see; and we'll know the power available for those who dare to sit quietly - who wait to see - who become power-prayers because of God's power changing them in the midst of their praying. Mountaintops give us strength and direction for the everyday...

Our scientific and technologic advances are impressive and exciting, for their own sakes and also because they enlarge our appreciation of Creation. But there is another dimension - the relationship offered by the Creator to the humanity the Creator loves - which will see us through every drought, every illness, every failure, every death. God is in our midst. May our eyes and hearts be still and learn to see and listen. May we become power-prayers as we see our lives in a new light: God's light! Amen.