

## Witness to Wonders

Please pray with me: Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

Throughout this pandemic, I have liked to focus on the small miracles around me and to approach the world with as much wonder as I can. I have tried to remember those early days of walking with my toddlers when everything they saw was a new wonder. My son and I could be outside for hours, only walking the length of our apartment complex because he was so constantly fascinated by every little bug, rock, and blade of grass. It helps to deal with gray days and isolation to focus on those quiet, happy memories. But it also helps to live like my son did then and really look closely at the sun sparkling off the snow covered trees, or listen to the birds' startling singing as we watch them hop among our bird feeders—their colors standing out so strikingly against the white snow. It helps to focus on the little miracles of life and goodness, no matter where we find them.

I thought of these things when I saw that the UCC's Worship Ways website listed today's theme as "witness to wonders." But as I read the scripture for today and commentaries written about it, I realized that the wonders described in 2 Kings and Mark are a of a different kind. These miracles are huge, incredible, stop-you-in-your-tracks-if-you-saw-them wonders. In both cases, disciples witness their masters suddenly transfigured with light and radiance.

Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, the lives of the disciples have been hard. They're living under the rule of a tyrant who has recently murdered John the

Baptist and who had ordered the murder of children. But they have tried to be followers of Jesus, believing that he was there to usher in the Kin-dom of God, and trying to support his ministry of teaching and healing. They've had to give up their previous lives and jobs. They've traveled from town to town and often relied on others to feed them. They've dealt with angry officials, crowds of people demanding help and healing, and angry religious leaders who doubt Jesus' authority. In short, they've struggled with the day-to-day work of following Jesus.

There are ways that our own journeys are similar. We struggle to show love and kindness in an angry, divided and frightened nation. We struggle to make our community and country more just for our black and brown skinned neighbors, to dismantle systems that oppress and punish the poor, to make our community more welcoming and affirming for our LGBTQ+ siblings. In the midst of all this struggle and hard work, it can seem like God's promises of hope and righteousness are a long way off.

Maybe they are, actually. But these moments of Elijah's ascendance and Jesus' transfiguration invite us to glimpse the glory of promises fulfilled.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? If you are Elisha, you know that Elijah is a prophet chosen by God and you have seen miracles happen around him. You know that he is about to be called home, and yet, you are still stunned by this moment because a chariot of fire and horses of fire suddenly appear, separating you from your master. Then there's a huge tornado which pulls your master away into the heavens as you watch in shock, grief, and joy.

Or can you imagine yourselves as Jesus' followers? You know that your master, Jesus, performs miracles and you believe that he's the son of God. But suddenly, he is glowing with a light brighter than the sun, the dead prophets Moses

and Elijah appear to talk with him, and a voice from heaven tells you that he is God's son, so you need to listen to him. Can you see yourself standing there, trembling with awe as you see that light and hear that voice? Can you take a moment and feel what you would be feeling?

As commentator Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay noted, this is a moment that invites us to take an extra long pause, to allow our hearts and bodies to feel the joy, the reverence, the amazement of that moment. It's a moment, she says, that helps remind us of who God is and of what has been promised. It's a moment to take a break and really worship God.

Rev. Dr. Lindsay says this:

“The ascendancy of Elijah and the Transfiguration of Jesus give their respective followers a taste of jubilee. It serves as a reminder of what their labor promises, their commitment pursues, and their hope proclaims. The glory of the Holy One on earth....

in worship, we are reminded that we are reaching for a destination that is glorious—not simply better or adequate, but glorious. Our goal is not just to feed the hungry but to participate in a world when all are fed. Our call is not to merely accept the immigrant in our midst, but to shape a world in which no one is labeled stranger. Through worship, we are reminded that a just world for all is not a pie-in-the-sky idea, but the mission of the body of Christ participating in realizing the kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven.”

Rev. Dr. Laura Miller-Purrenhage  
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And so the Transfiguration invites us to take a break and just worship, so that we can focus on this glory that is to come, on this glory that our work as disciples is all about.

In the end, after this moment of rest and worship, we will again be called to go back into the world and keep working, as did Elisha and as did the disciples. We will be called to listen to Jesus again, to lift up our own crosses and follow him. But we will be able to do so with more fortitude, with greater courage, and with greater joy because this momentary glimpse of future glory has refreshed us with renewed hope and trust.

So come now and fix your eyes on Christ in all of his transfigured glory.  
Come now and worship our God. Amen.