

**jCentre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper  
Sunday, February 27, 2022  
Transfiguration Sunday**

**“Chosen”**

**Christian Scripture: Luke 9:28-36**

Friends, when I left you a year ago this month, I went into a kind of exile in southeastern Massachusetts. My exile was a means to, what I believe to be, a worthy end. During the year, I experienced what it is to be dis-placed and in a state of dis-ease. And when it was disclosed to me that the end would never come to fruition, I returned here, as intended, to this place.



One of my first acts of reunion was to hike-up Mount Wantastiquet. I climbed the mountain alone. I intended that the journey and destination orient my compass, set my bearings, and ground myself again. No beloved Tesla. No cellphone. No computer. No music. Nothing but mountain.



On that day, I ascended the mountain smack dab in the middle of a snow storm. I had never seen the mountain in such an extreme state. The fresh snow made it seem as if I was the first person to ever encounter its slope; although I knew native Americans had for hundreds, if not thousands of years, ventured upon it. The native Americans tended to name places and regions after their rivers or watersheds. The site of today's Brattleboro, at the confluence of the West and Connecticut rivers, was called 'Wantastiquet' by the Abenaki people, a name meaning, according to various translations, 'lost river' or 'river of the lonely way'.<sup>1</sup> So, there I was on a mountain that stood above the 'river of the lonely way'. In hiking-up the mountain on my own lonely way, I prayed that I would obtain a perspective.

When I reached the summit of the mountain to view a vista, to gain a new perspective, to survey the entirety of my geographical context, I couldn't see a damn thing! I summited during a 'white-out'. To be honest, I muttered a few non-

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<sup>1</sup> "Brattleboro, Vermont", found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brattleboro,\\_Vermont#:~:text=Because%20Native%20Americans%20in%20the,%22lost%20river%22%2C%20%22river](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brattleboro,_Vermont#:~:text=Because%20Native%20Americans%20in%20the,%22lost%20river%22%2C%20%22river), accessed February 27, 2022.

ecclesiastical expletives under my breath. I thought, “Brilliant idea, Scott! You just hiked the better part of two hours to see pretty much nothing”. So before heading-down, I sat on a cold rock and listened. And I listened. And I heard more than I saw. And I felt more than I heard. And I realized I was more than the loneliness I felt. And I glimpsed, for just a moment, that there was more than I was. For a moment, I was whole. Rather than frozen, I felt chosen. Chosen by God to be. And chosen by the mountain to ‘see’ anew.

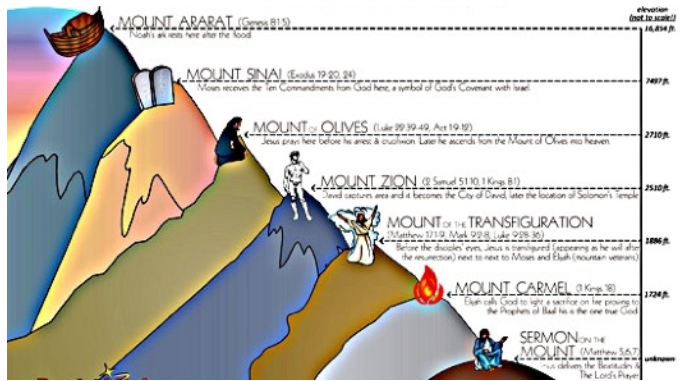


Our scripture reading this morning from Luke tells the story of a revelation that came to Peter, James, and John. This revelation occurred on a mountain, Mount Tabor, to be specific. No doubt, the three felt special, or chosen, to accompany Jesus on the mountain to pray. I believe Jesus shared with Peter, James, and John his interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus likely narrated the story of Moses’ exodus into the desert and Elijah’s desperate flight into the wilderness. Jesus reminded his companions that they were now also retreating to natural isolation. Jesus likely told them he was soon to depart in a lonely manner as did Moses and in a somewhat mysterious manner as did Elijah. While

recognizing Jesus was a prophet similar to those before, Peter, James, and John heard, saw, and *felt* that Jesus was qualitatively distinct from previous prophets – it was revealed to them on that mountain that Jesus was extraordinary. Now, how do you explain all that Jesus taught, all that the disciples heard, and all that the four of them experienced on the mountain - that indescribable sense of understanding and wholeness - in about two hundred words? You can't. So you summarize. You use metaphor.



No, the Transfiguration was not some kind of divine manifestation of bioluminescence! The sacred story of Jesus' transfiguration intended to convey, first, the importance of Moses and Elijah's ministries, and, two, the depth and power of Jesus' extraordinary wisdom as perceived by his disciples. The story of the transfiguration also retells a narrative about Jesus' baptism when God declared Jesus to be his Chosen One, God's Anointed: the Messiah. In other words, Jesus' bioluminescence communicated, as one of my colleagues in the ministry recently quipped, that "Jesus is the dude!"



What is it about mountains and wildernesses that transmits God’s wisdom?

Jesus’ time of trial in the wilderness, ascent up a mountain, and lightning-bug experience seems to mirror Moses’ forty years in the wilderness, ascent up Mount Sinai, and lightning-bug experience.



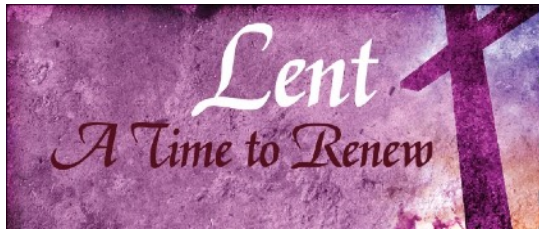
The sacredness of wilderness and mountains is not exclusive to the Hebrew or Christian traditions. The prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, received the Holy Qur’an from the archangel Gabriel while in a cave named Hira on Mount Jabal au-Nour just outside of Mecca.<sup>2</sup> It turns out, the translation of the mountain

<sup>2</sup> “Where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received his first revelation”, *Mecca*, found at: <https://mecca.net/pictures-and-information-about-the-mountain-of-light-and-cave-of-hira/>, accessed February 27, 2022.

in English is “Mountain of Light”. It is no coincidence that the three closely related monotheistic faiths all share similar experiences!<sup>3</sup>

I hope to convey to you this morning that God desires - not just Moses, not just Elijah, not just James, John, and Peter, not just Jesus, not just Mohammad, not just Scott - but also *each and every one of you* to enter a sacred and liminal space whereby you sense and understand an inexplicable wholeness.<sup>4</sup> God desires these experiences for everyone *and everything!*

I conclude this message by inviting you to seek from God an illuminating experience whereby you feel a connection with, and the presence of, God.



Lent begins this week on Wednesday. Centre Church invites you to participate in one or more of six offerings that fosters an increased devotion to your faith. The first two offerings are to receive the Imposition of Ashes at 1:00pm on Main Street or at our 7:00pm service, both on Wednesday. The third offering is to attend

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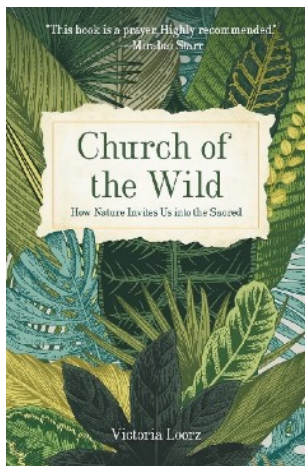
<sup>3</sup> “Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right – shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or regret”.  
*The Koran*, Penguin Classics, translated with notes by N.J. Dawood, (London, England: Penguin Books, 1993), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Loorz terms these places ‘thresholds.

Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 15.

worship for the next six weeks during which we will journey through a Lenten sermon series. The series will speak to our fourth offering, a compelling devotional book entitled *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred* that you can purchase on-line or here at the church (see *eNews*).

Accompanying our book study will be a seminar that meets mid-day, every other Tuesday, beginning this Tuesday. And last but not least, you are invited to a daily Lenten practice that invites you to encounter the sacred in and through nature.

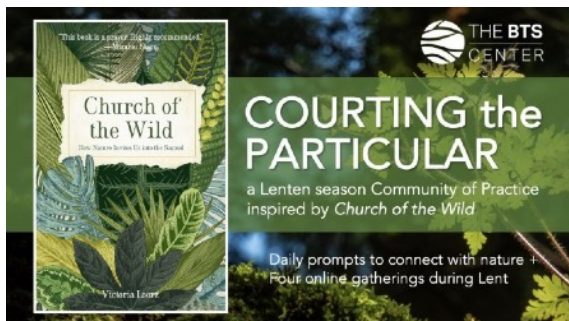


In her book *Church of the Wild*, Victoria Loorz “uncovers the wild roots of faith and helps us deepen our commitment to a suffering earth by falling in love with it – and calling it ‘church’. Here Loorz helps us connect to a love that literally holds the world together – a love that calls us into communion with all creatures”.<sup>5</sup> Loorz explains to us that the biblical narrative and most of our own experiences reveal to us that we “can’t understand prayer *or* mountains without

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<sup>5</sup> Loorz, *Church of the Wild*, back cover.

practicing both together”.<sup>6</sup> During Lent, a time of introspection and prayer, Loorz advocates that we practice daily and intimately in and with nature. Loorz is not asking us to go to Yellowstone National Park nor to hike-up Wantastiquet in a blizzard. No. Loorz invites us this Lent to simply soak in the Earth wherever we are and can; on our porch, out our window, in our yard, at a recreational park, in the midst of a trail, along the shore of a frozen lake, or surrounded by a reserve. Loorz invites us to worship in a sanctuary far grander than that which we could ever construct.



All that Centre Church offers this Lent (the sermon series, the book, the seminar, and the practices) can be accepted individually or collectively. All of the offerings suggest that we are most likely to encounter the divine in nature. God is most often and most profoundly experienced among the fauna, the wildlife, and the landscape. Friends, this is not liberal thinking. This is not progressive thinking. This is not New Age thinking. In fact, precisely the opposite! This is *ancient* practice. Moses. Elijah. James, John, and Peter. Jesus. Mohammad. Scott. *Each and*

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<sup>6</sup> Loorz, *Church of the Wild*, 65.



*every one of you*, if you are open. Friends, this Lent, journey with me. Be Transfigured. Choose to be Chosen.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, "Amen!"