

When you are facing a big challenge, what do you do? Some are saying Jesus is the Messiah. So Jesus decides its challenge time. He goes climbing up a mountain to pray with Peter, John, and James.

Everyone thought the Messiah would be a military hero who would free God's people from the Romans. Jesus knew God had other plans, and it would be a challenge. So he decides to pray, to prepare.

They could have prayed where they were. But they go climbing up the mountain to get away from their regular life. When we step aside from our routine, we get perspective, space to rest, exercise, and renew ourselves.

But Peter, James, John, and Jesus are not just going on a good vacation. They walk all this way to do some serious praying together. And while they are praying, they have some unusual experiences.

Everything begins to shine with God's glory. And even Moses and Elijah appear in God's glory, and its all centered on the person of Jesus. The glory of God becomes so thick that it is like a cloud that envelopes them.

And they hear God's voice come out of the cloud and say, this is my beloved Son, my chosen; listen to him!" And then the unusual manifestations of God's glory stop, and there is Jesus, looking at them.

Most people do not have unusual experiences of God that are quite this dramatic. God was preparing Jesus, and Peter, James, and John, for the difficult plan that Jesus would be crucified, and die.

To free people to share God's life and love. And to give up the idea that military might or violence would ever bring about the healing and just world everyone needs.

We may not have experiences quite this dramatic, but everyone has to struggle and suffer--sooner or later in life. In those struggles and sufferings, many people who make a habit of praying alone and with others, like Jesus and his disciples did, report that they are visited with a sense of God's special presence.

They are touched by the glory of God, like Jesus, Peter, John, and James. They may even be given a special word from God, like the disciples were. Not everyone hears God directly in this life, but a surprising number of us, sooner or later, may. Especially if we make it a custom to go apart and pray.

Usually God uses very few words, because it startles and excites us, and we remember the words, like they were tattooed into us.

"When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis" That is how the only American that the Episcopal Church has named a Christian prophet described the beginning of his struggle to help African Americans overcome legal barriers to their full participation as equal citizens.

One night after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had answered the phone, an anonymous person had threatened to burn down his house and kill his family while they slept. He went into the kitchen, and sat down at the kitchen table, and cried out to God.

He said he wanted to figure out how to get out of the movement for civil rights without appearing a coward. He was tired, and scared, and felt inadequate. So he started really praying to God.

"And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it. I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night.

I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage they will begin to get weak."

Then the glory of God began to descend on Martin, and he said, "at that moment [that] I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And I will be with you, even until the end of the world."

What did Martin hear? It was the voice of Jesus--who went to the cross to stand up for God's love in the face of human evil. Who rose from the dead to say to his followers, "when you do what I ask you to do in my name, you will not be alone.

You will have a companion, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth and comfort, and the Holy Spirit will bring I and my father to dwell with you. And I will be with you, even unto the end of the world.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared."

God has special tasks that each one of us can do in life, but we only become aware of these special tasks when we take time to pray.

God longs for each of us to be touched by the glory of God. Prayer is where it starts.

Each of us will have times of struggle and suffering. We have no choice about it. We do have a choice about whether we discover that we are God's beloved.

We do have a choice about whether we listen, as God asks us to, to the voice of his beloved Son Jesus. And this leads us to the best choices of all.

Our experience of God's love changes us. We can begin to choose to do difficult things. Because we believe that this is what God's love wants us to do.

And even if it is hard, it makes us glad to be able to witness to the love that changes us into its own children, able to share its life.

The only life that abides with us for always. Amen. 1043