

**Homily: Last Sunday after the Epiphany, February 17, 2026  
Emmanuel and St. Anne's Episcopal Churches  
The Rev. David W Perkins. Th.D.**

**Improving Our Sight and Hearing**

Tennessee naturalist and writer, Joseph Krutch once quipped, "**The rare moment is not the moment when there is something worth looking at, but the moment when we are capable of seeing.**" @

Notice that in all of today's readings, the people are seeing and hearing. And, note that they are transformed and affected by what they see. We are not transformed so much by what we do as whom we see and what we hear.

Epiphany means to shine upon—God's light always is shining within and on us—the question is have we seen and not known. Biblical stories like these may well lie beyond our experience and may contradict a version of scientific thinking that walls God out of the material world.

We may well feel such a disconnect from today's Gospel. But researchers now are cataloging experiences of transcendence that are far too common and far too similar to be fiction. I agree with Dale Allison, New Testament professor at Princeton. "**We should not shrink experience to fit our understanding but enlarge our understanding to take in experience.**"

I must confess that I've spent too little of my life not standing on tiptoe looking for God's next moment of showing up. Today, I hope we can find encouragement to be on our tiptoes more of the time.

**God's Presence Always Involves Our Seeing and Hearing**

What are some of the ways God's presence shines forth? God always is present—but we often don't see.

Word and Sacrament  
Religious images/paintings  
Poetry  
Music  
The life of another person  
Creation—thunderstorm, sunset, rainbow  
Dreams and visions

White light visions; Meta normal moments outside worship. White light visions, visions of angels, being enveloped in loving presence; people speaking with dead loved ones, energy from the touch of someone gifted in healing.

When Bishop Robert Hargrove laid hands on me at the ordination to priesthood, I felt a strong electric shock and jerked. He leaned over and whispered, "Did you feel that?" He shared later that he discovered a gift for healing prayer had been given him.

I had an experience at age 16 that remained my secret until last year. My parents were resisting my call to ministry in favor of my attending medical school. Dad would take away my car keys after Saturday date night so I couldn't drive to supply preach on Sunday. My Baptist deacon granddad would pick up, which looked innocent enough to them, and drive me to my preaching gigs.

I was lying in bed with the window open on a Louisiana spring night. A light came in the window and went to the foot of the bed, taking human shape. That light said nothing, just stood there for about 5 minutes before going back out the window. I thought I had seen Jesus. But when I shared this for the first time last year with a researcher, he asked two questions. "What color was the light?" "Blue," I answered. "Why did you think it was a male?" "Because of the height, I think." He said I probably had seen an angel.

If your life has been touched by an experience of transcendence, you may not have told anyone because they would think you were nuts. But you are not!!

Augustine, in *The Confessions*, says: **"What is that which gleams through me and smites my heart without wounding it? I am both a-shudder and a-glow. A-shudder, in so far as I am unlike it, a-glow in so far as I am like it."** \$

### How Do We Respond?

We must be open to God's visitations. God in freedom hides and shines forth. The epiphany/visitation may well be an interruption of the everyday. the surprise signals a visitation! The Mount of Transfiguration was just such an interruption. We must question a world view that sees such experiences as not possible; we must question our biases that might be blunting our capacity to see and hear. Dale Allison put it well. **"We need . . . to overcome our historical and personal prejudices. Despite all the opinion to the contrary, a heap of firsthand testimony tells**

**us that our world is not disenchanted, that intercourse with the transcendent has not gone away The metanormal remains with us-- amazing us, comforting, us assailing us, confusing us.” %**

Sometimes in the Bible people express dread and discomfort. So in our lives. God is not just love; God also is raw energy, life, power, vastness—like a spiritual thunderstorm. So, it is not unusual that we might feel awe, dread, guilt, shame, smallness as well as fascination and even confusion. These all may be signs of God’s activity. But, God doesn’t want to leave us there; rather, God desires to move us on to the experience of divine love. Note that when Jesus’ companions felt fear at the voice from heaven, Jesus touched them and told them not to fear.

Our body might signal us of God’s nearness. Perhaps you’ve had the experience of a physical chill, of your blood running cold, of a warmth in your chest, of tears, of the hair seemingly standing up on the back of your neck. Perhaps you felt energy around a word from the Bible or while receiving communion. Perhaps you felt embraced in love and joy. It might have been in response to a scene in nature, a piece of music, singing in church, receiving Communion, something said in a sermon or during a reading of Scripture.

In that moment of divine awe God will give us a note of encouragement and hope rather than feelings of hopelessness and shame. (NB Isaiah 6; Moses in Ex 3-4; Jesus in today’s Gospel.

What we see and hear of the divine Spirit leaves us energized and emboldened to act, to love, to serve. Note that Moses, Elisha, and Jesus had wills of iron to persist. Jesus wrestled with evil in the desert and prevailed. Peter and the others overcame their fears and persisted. We cannot find the energy to love, serve, and risk in a set of ideas held in the brain. Only the non-rational experience of God will suffice. And, we cannot find the energy to deal with our personal evil and turn ourselves outward toward God and others merely from ideas about God. As Tillich put it, **“The ‘in’ of the divine Spirit is an ‘out’ for the human spirit.”** &

Monk David Steindl-Rast says, **“Religious experience is simply our awareness of communion with the Ultimate.”**

...

**“Communion with the Ultimate may surprise and overwhelm us unawares in peak moments of aliveness. . . Or it may happen that we experience the same communion with the Ultimate as slowly slowly dawning on us during a long-drawn-out struggle to remain faithful to ourselves. . . . What counts is that it happens, not how. What counts is that**

**we somehow experience a limitless belonging to that unspeakable mystery which alone ultimately matters.”\***

### **My Invitation to You**

We all come to faith in Christ by encounter with mystery. We find the energy to live, to let go of ourselves, for freedom from evil, and to risk Christian behaviors in our non-rational experience of God, apart from the mere body of ideas.

One can't stand on tiptoe endlessly, but we can pray for energy and alertness to stand on tiptoe more of the time so that we do not fail to see and hear. We can seek freedom from biases in our world view that blunt our ability to see and hear. We trust that Christ lives within us and that the Spirit will release him/herself with energy of love. We look deeply.

We ask God today to allow us to experience the wonder of the divine presence and love in God's way and in God's time. And, we ask so that we can share divine love out of the energy of what God gives us.

American poet, William Stafford, on the day of his death, captured what I'm trying to say in a poem. Closing lines

**"Are you Mr. William Stafford?"**

**"Yes, but...."**

.....

**You can't tell when strange things with meaning will happen. I'm [still] here writing it down just the way it was. "You don't have to prove anything," my mother said. "Just be ready for what God sends." I listened and put my hand out in the sun again. It was all easy. +**

### **Notes**

@ Joseph Wood Krutch, cited in "Daily Dig," 28 June 2005, [www.bruderhof.com](http://www.bruderhof.com)

# Dale C Allison, Jr. *Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), p. 171.

% Dale C Allison, Jr. *Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), p. 191.

& Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1957, 1963), 3:III-III2.

\* David Steindl-Rast, foreword to *Meister Eckhart, from Whom God Hid Nothing: Sermons, Writings & Sayings*, ed. David O'Neal, (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), pp. vii-viii.

+ William Stafford, *The Way it Is: New and Selected Poems* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf, 1998), p. 46. }Written aug 28, 1993, on the morning of his death in Oregon.