It was an ordinary day, or so I thought – a day way back in 1983, and the pastor of my home church, Asbury United Methodist Church in New Castle, called and asked if we could get together for lunch. “Sure,” I said. We did that periodically, because I was running the youth program at the time and also directing the handbell choir. So we met occasionally to go over things. So we set the date and time, and arranged to meet for lunch at Arner’s.

I showed up, he showed up, we sat down, and began to talk, and within minutes, my world was turned upside down, and what started out to be an ordinary lunch turned into an extraordinary moment in my life. Because Ron asked me a question, one that would change the course of my life. He asked, “Karen, do you think God might be calling you to ordained ministry?”

I was more than stunned, and I’ll tell you why. I had never met a clergywoman. Oh sure, women were ordained back then, but I had never met one personally. On top of that, as I’ve told you before, I was uncomfortable speaking in public. So Ron’s question really threw me, but somehow, some way, something opened up in my heart and I felt God’s glory, if you will. Somehow, some way, I knew what Ron was saying was true, and within a few months of that conversation, I had quit my job, packed up and moved to Washington, DC and started seminary – and the rest, as they say, is history.

But who knew, when I set up what I thought was going to be “just another lunch” something so unbelievable would happen?

Well, God did, because as we’ll see from this morning’s lessons, God does those kind of things on a regular basis. All of the characters who appear in the Gospel lesson had it happen to them.

The oldest of them, Moses, had it happen to him also on what was supposed to be just another ordinary day of tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. You know the story well, I’m sure – Moses was tending sheep up on Mt. Horeb and suddenly he encounters a burning bush, and finds himself standing on holy ground, and he hears the voice of God calling him to lead God’s people who are suffering
mightily at the hands of the Egyptians. Who knew, when Moses got out of bed that day and headed off to just another day of sheep herding, that he would see God’s glory and come down the mountain a changed person?

Or how about Elijah, another character who appears in the Gospel lesson? Elijah, a prophet, who was suffering mightily because of the things he was prophesying. The people didn’t want to hear what he had to say, and a queen by the name of Jezebel really didn’t like what he had to say, so much so that she threatened his life. So Elijah took off and ran as far as he could before he fell exhausted. He had run for a whole day and found himself in the wilderness. The scripture says that he sat down under a broom tree and asked God to let him die. He was tired, he was worn, he couldn’t take being a prophet anymore. But instead of letting him die, God sent angels to minister to him, and he got up and keep going.

He found himself, eventually, in a cave on Mt. Horeb. And there, still struggling with his life as a prophet, he waited to hear from God. And oh, he heard a lot of things – first, incredible winds, like those in a hurricane; then, an earthquake, and then, fire – but in none of those did he hear God’s voice. Then, suddenly, quietly, he heard a “still, small voice” and it was God – who told him, basically, to keep on keeping on, that it was going to be okay, and God himself would be with him. In that still, small voice, Elijah experienced the glory of God.

And then, of course, the main characters in the Gospel lesson – Peter, James and John. Now, you know, from reading scripture, that these three were among the closest of Jesus’ confidantes. Peter, of course, looms large in scripture, and John is many times referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” So it was certainly not uncommon for Jesus to come up to these three and say, “let’s go for a walk,” which is what he did on this fateful day. And those three had no way of knowing that this would be no ordinary walk.

So the four of them headed up the mountain. When they got to the top, it happened! Suddenly, without warning, the three disciples saw Jesus transfigured right before their eyes! Suddenly, his clothes became dazzling white, and standing beside him were Moses and Elijah. The scripture says that the three of them were terrified – no wonder! This brilliant light coming from Jesus, and then seeing these two spiritual greats – long dead, of course – standing right there in front of them! No wonder they were terrified!

And then a cloud overshadows them, and from the cloud they hear the very voice of God, saying “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” And then, just as quickly as it had begun, it was over. The light was gone, the Old Testament figures were gone, the cloud and God’s voice were gone, and it was just Jesus, standing in front of them.
Wow! The great writer Frederick Buechner says this about it: “It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they’d tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they’d seen as hungry, tired and footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the Messiah, the Christ, in his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.” (Frederick Buechner, Whistling in the Dark)

It was an incredible moment for them all. A high, holy moment when they caught a glimpse of God’s glory, and it would change them forever – because in that moment they knew who he was, and what he had come to do, and they would never forget it. They came down the mountain changed in at least, I think, a couple of different ways.

First, they came down from the mountain seeing through new eyes. The glory they saw up there caused them to now see God’s glory in the everyday. They wouldn't just remember that moment of glory, but they would now see glimpses of God’s incredible glory all along the way. They would see it in tears flowing from the eyes of those whom Jesus healed. They would see it in the faces of children who Jesus called forward while others pushed them away. They would see it as they broke bread with Jesus. They would see it in the faces of forgiven sinners who heard Jesus talk about the lost, the last and the least. That moment on the mountain changed them forever, so that their eyes suddenly began to see God’s glory all around them, in the ordinary moments of ordinary days.

That’s what glimpsing God’s glory does for you. I don’t know what your “high, holy moments” have been, but I’m sure you’ve all had them – moments when your hearts soars, feeling as close to God as you’ve ever been before. Maybe it was on a mountaintop for you, or at a retreat, or on an Emmaus weekend. Or maybe it was at the birth of a child, or when you heard a particular piece of music, or something in a sermon hit you over the head in a powerful way. All I know is that once you’ve caught a glimpse of God’s glory, you begin to see life in a new way – and you’re more likely to see little glimpses of God’s glory in your everyday life.

Hear again, some more words from Frederick Buechner, talking about these glimpses of glory. He writes: “Even with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in, or just having a beer at a Saturday baseball game in July. Every once and so often (he writes), something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it’s almost beyond bearing.” (Ibid)
Maybe some of you had a moment like that yesterday, when a little child handed you a hand-made Valentine. I know I’ve had moments like that, when, as we’re all saying the Lord’s Prayer together, I’ll hear a child’s voice lagging just split-seconds behind the rest of us, and it makes me melt. There is nothing sweeter.

Pastor Jon Walton tells a very moving story about glimpsing God’s glory. He had a friend whose wife died after she had had a stroke. They had been married over fifty years. She was in a nursing home for several years after the stroke, and her husband came to see her every day of those years. He would spend the day with her, helping to feed her and change her, holding her hand and talking to her, Walton says, “as if she could understand all that he said.” And then, he continues: “When I would go and visit, as I entered the room, I thought I sometimes saw Jesus, Moses and Elijah and the cloud of God’s presence filling the place where they were.” (On-line, Jon Walton, “I’ll Have What She’s Having,” March 2, 2014)

God’s glory – sometimes we have those moments when we’re drawn so close to Him it’s breathtaking; and when we do, it changes how we see all of life – we tend to see little glimpses of God’s glory all around us. That’s one of the ways that the disciples changed after their experience with Jesus on the mountain.

And the other thing that that experience did was to give them strength for the journey ahead. Seeing Jesus transfigured, knowing in their heart of hearts that he was indeed, God’s Son, the Messiah, gave them renewed strength. Hearing God’s voice assured them. Seeing Moses and Elijah was a clear sign that Jesus had come to fulfill what they had begun – Moses being the lawgiver, and Elijah, a prophet – they knew now that Jesus had come to fulfill the law and the prophets. So they went down that mountain knowing, without a doubt, who Jesus was and what he had come to do – and more importantly, that God was with him and them.

And boy, would they need to rely on that in the days ahead. Because, as you know, we’re about to enter the season of Lent, and the journey that we remember during this season is filled with trials and tribulations – literally – for all of them. They will find themselves threatened, persecuted, challenged. They will find themselves afraid more times than they can imagine. And, in the end, they will watch as the beloved Son of God is arrested and tried, beaten and bruised, and put to death on a cruel cross.

The road after they come down from the mountain will get ugly, and oh, how they need the sweet assurance that God is with them through it all to carry them through – and they had it, because of this experience with Jesus.

And friends, so do we. No matter what our days hold for us – good or ill – Christ is with us. When times are good, and things are going well, he rejoices with us; but when times are tough, and we struggle, and the world (as one person has
said) is trying its best to get the best of us – He is with us still. And if we forget that, we need only think back to those high, holy moments and remember. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, will carry us when we can’t carry ourselves, and will always make a way – no matter what.

One day, years and years ago, the great pianist Jan Paderewski, was scheduled to give a performance at an American concert hall for a high-society extravaganza. In the audience was a mother with an extremely rambunctious and fidgety nine year old son. Tired of waiting for the concert to begin, and when his mother’s head was turned, the boy left his seat and went wandering. And he went wandering down to the stage, where the great Steinway piano was sitting. Before anyone knew it, he sat down and started playing “Chopsticks!” Well, the snooty crowd got their noses out of joint and started yelling, “Somebody get that kid off the stage! Of all the nerve!” Well, Paderewski was backstage and he heard the uproar, came out on the stage, went over to the piano – who was still playing “Chopsticks” by the way, and began to improvise and play a countermelody to what the boy was playing. As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy’s ear, “Keep going. Don’t quit, son . . . don’t stop . . . don’t stop.” (Sermon illustrations.com)

Oh friends, isn’t that what God does for us in Christ? Puts His arms around us and whispers, “don’t quit, don’t stop – I’m right here with you. I was with you in those moments of incredible closeness and brilliant glory, and I’m with you when people are yelling at you and life is tough. Don’t quit, don’t stop.”

I think that’s what the disciples heard as they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and walked the final journey with Jesus. And that’s what we hear every days of our lives, if we only have ears to listen.

So my friends, my prayer is that you will look around you, this day and every day, and glimpse God’s glory; but more than that, know that His glory will carry you through all the days of your life. May it be so. Amen.