

I have decided there is a question, or a topic of questions, that it should be illegal in this country for a woman to ever ever ever ask a man. That question is, "Does this dress make me look fat?" If you want to put a man into a state of total sweat-dripping-off-his-brow panic ask him that question. There is no right answer! I know from experience. If I say, "No, it makes you look great!" The answer is, "You're lying! Tell me the truth." And whether I was lying or not it doesn't matter. If I try in the most gentle and genuine way I can to say, "Well, to be honest, it's not the most flattering thing you own. You have other things that make you look much better." I'm either going to get hit with pure unadulterated rage, or a fit of tears that make me feel like the cruelest creature on earth.

I wish I had the courage of my one cousin who when his wife asks if a dress makes her look fat, and you have to understand she is very slim, he says, "You look like a beached whale!"

Yes, ask a man to comment on a woman's appearance is putting him into a double-bind, a catch 22.

You know how when Moses goes up the mountain to receive the law from God, and he comes back down his face shines so he puts a veil over it? I'm so glad the Bible nowhere records him saying, "Is my glow beginning to fade?" And after the Transfiguration and all the glory of that event Jesus never says, "Are my dazzling whites losing their dazzle?"

I'm using all this silliness to remind us that God doesn't play games with us, and God doesn't put us in double-binds.

The Transfiguration is an amazing and awe-inspiring event for Jesus and the three disciples who witnessed it. It's hard to understand the point of it. Indeed, it is the turning event of Jesus' ministry. He changes his plans from just general preaching, teaching, and healing in the northern areas of Galilee to journeying to Jerusalem and his crucifixion.

There's lots we can look at from our gospel reading, but one thing I want to look at is the contrast between the big amazing scene and Jesus' gentleness with the disciples. Like a woman asking a man how she looks in a dress, this could have been an absolutely terrifying experience for the disciples. They feel small. They are scared. They don't know what to do. Peter does what comes naturally to him - he starts talking, not knowing what he's saying.

So you have this tremendous scene: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah appearing bright and in glory. Then you have this bright cloud and a disembodied voice from the cloud. We presume it is the voice of God. And it makes a proclamation, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Then what are Jesus next words? Actually, that's jumping ahead. Look at what happens. Jesus steps away from Moses and Elijah. He comes to the disciples. They have fallen to the ground and they are trembling with fear. And the Bible says Jesus touched them. I imagine it is Jesus crouching down beside them and laying a hand on their shoulders. It is an inviting gesture that inspires warmth and confidence.

Last fall when my son's cub scout pack was recruiting new members at the school open house there were several other packs there too. We all had booths and displays set up in this wide hallway. One pack was not very successful in recruiting at all. I thought it was obvious why. The person representing the pack was a large man wearing a full scouting uniform - and no, it did not make him look fat. He stood behind their display and regularly bellowed out, "Anyone want to join scouting?" Other packs, my son's included, had parents in front of the displays. When little boys approached the parents knelt down, made eye contact with them on their level and introduced themselves. They made it a safe, warm, and inviting experience. And no surprise, they were much more successful in recruiting new members.

Jesus does not stand over the disciples and say, "Get up, you wimps! What are you afraid of?" Despite this amazing vision of glory, he steps away from it, walks to the disciples, I think kneels down among them, reaches out and touches them and only then does he speak. So we've just gotten the command from the cloud to listen to him and in this new posture Jesus says, "Get up and do not be afraid."

As Christians we do well to respect that God has infinite power. God is not to be mocked. But it is also God's nature to step away from the power and glory, kneel down, touch us, and say, "Get up and do not be afraid."

In a way the Transfiguration is the story of our relationship with God told in miniature: God's amazing power, God's willingness to step away from it, and God's invitation to us.

When Peter and James and John leave the mountain Jesus is still with them. The return to the ordinariness of daily life, now with a deeper understanding of who Jesus is. They won't understand Jesus fully yet. It will take the crucifixion and resurrection for that, but they understand more.

I find lots of theology about God's presence in the crisis times of life, or in the hard times of life. I've preached many times about unfair things happening and God often seeming to be

absent. But let's also not forget about the ordinary times in life.

I have a feeling that most days come and go for you and not a whole lot eventful really happens. You get up, you go to work, you make routine decisions or do routine tasks. You come home. If you have kids you play taxi service all night long. You find some time to eat and some time for a little relaxation. Then you go to bed and do it all over again the next day.

In the boring, mundane ordinariness of life it is also hard to see God at work. It is hard to see a purpose. You can find yourself thinking, "Am I really doing anything significant here? Does my life have a purpose? Am I just a statistic going through the motions of being alive until someday I die?"

Yes, God is with you in the ordinariness of life too. Jesus came down the mountain and continued to minister in the everyday lives of the people. He did it gladly. He continued to kneel down and touch people. He talked to them. He continued to lift up the hurting and broken. He continued to

challenge the hard of heart and those who had lost sight of God's goodness.

We know that even though Jesus was dead, raised, and ascended he has promised to be with us always. He is here with us now. In other words, God's grace is present always: in the excitement, in the pain, and in the ordinary too. In fact, God's grace is with you even when your dress makes you look fat.

Amen