A few weeks ago, it finally happened…I FINALLY saw the movie *Frozen*. For anyone who doesn’t know, *Frozen* is an animated Disney movie. It has been around and popular for a number of years. I’ve seen little girls wearing their Elsa costumes and singing “Let It Go” for years now, but I didn’t have a clue what it was all about. But now that I have my own little girl who wears an Elsa costume and sings “Let It Go,” the time was approaching for me to watch the movie. It actually drew my interest because she started watching clips of the movie on YouTube and so I watched them too. As I watched the clips, I started wondering why this thing was happening or how that scene fit into the whole story. So then I HAD to watch the movie, just too see how it all fit together. And I admit, I really enjoyed it.

But after watching the movie, I still had a number of questions. Why didn’t Elsa’s parents teach her to control her magic rather than locking her away? Did her sister Ana really grow up so isolated that she couldn’t even have friends? What happened to Kristoph’s parents? Where did Olaf come from if Elsa was even surprised to see him? Was Prince Hans evil when he first met Ana or did he become that way over time? Sometimes the experience of seeing or hearing something ourselves, like a movie or something else, doesn’t make everything clear, doesn’t answer all of our questions and can actually leave us with a bit of mystery.

Just like…Luke’s account of the Transfiguration of our Lord that we heard today. This passage is always such a challenge for preaching each year. And no matter how many years we hear it, it generally evokes more questions. It is one of those experiences that we really can’t relate to our own lives. While the phrase “mountaintop experience” probably came from this story, our “mountaintop experiences” are most likely far different from what was experienced by Peter, James and John. In other gospel accounts, Jesus tells his 3 disciples not to tell anyone about the experience, whereas, here in Luke it just says that they didn’t tell anyone about it. Regardless of Jesus’ instruction, I’m sure we can imagine this experience being something the 3 men couldn’t talk about even if they wanted to as they themselves pondered what just happened.

So let’s take note of a few things. The first is that this story comes on the heels of Jesus’ first prediction of his death. In the verses preceding today’s passage, Jesus tells his disciples that he must suffer and be rejected by the religious authorities and be killed and on the third day be raised. THEN he talks about the way of discipleship being the way of the cross. This had to be a hard pill to swallow for Jesus’ followers. Associating God’s Messiah with suffering probably raised some questions, maybe even doubts. It is eight days after Jesus said all of THIS that this experience on the mountain occurred.

The next thing to note is that Jesus was going up on the mountain to pray. Luke’s gospel reports many instances of Jesus praying. In THIS instance, however, knowing what Jesus had just recently discussed with his disciples, we can see how this experience of the mountaintop was not just for the benefit of Peter, James and John. It also functions as a time of encouragement for Jesus. On the mountaintop, Jesus prays and in response, Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah, who, together, discuss what Jesus is facing.

With these “notes” in mind, we can understand this scene as a moment of reassurance for both Jesus and his 3 disciples. Jesus has conversation with Moses and Elijah and Peter, James and John see that grouping and then hear the voice of God from the cloud when God says, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” If Peter, James and John are holding any questions or doubts because of Jesus’ prediction of his death, they now have to make space to also hold this scene, the presence and message of God, “Listen to him.”

And this is really what encapsulates our life of faith…holding the assurances that God, through Christ, has given us throughout our lives alongside the tension that comes from our uncertainty and confusion about where God is, what God is up to and where we’re supposed to be in all of it. We don’t need the same experience as Peter, James and John to know how confusing, how mysterious it is to believe in God through Christ, and yet…believe in the presence of God and God’s love in our midst and yet…want to firmly believe in everything we’ve been taught without any doubt, and yet…

One thing we should never believe about Peter, James and John’s experience on the mountaintop is that it gave them a strong faith to act decisively as soon as they came down. That was not the case at all. It made a lot more sense later, AFTER Jesus’ resurrection, but for a while they were holding space for ALL of this in their hearts and minds…the confusion and doubt about the suffering and death part of what Jesus’ said along with the cloud and the voice on the mountaintop, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

We as ELCA Lutheran Christians can hold space for all of this…doubt, uncertainty, confusion, faith and hope. We are not either/or Christians, we are both/and Christians. What that means is that we know that our relationship with God is not dependent on OUR perfect understanding or on OUR certainty about who God is or how God works or on OUR strong faith. The relationship is dependent solely upon God’s love for us, where we are at. When we say we are both/and Christians, it means that we can hold space for a couple different possibilities of how life is and leave it to the mystery of God’s ways and God’s understanding.

One of the greatest mysteries of God is why God loves us in the first place. But God does love us because Jesus was sent into the world and endured suffering and death out of love for all of humanity. Jesus invited Peter, James and John into the experience on the mountaintop. Jesus accompanied them down the mountain, spent time with them and many others while he lived and died at the hands of humanity rather than fighting back. It was out of love for all of us. And through his resurrection, God through Christ continues to be with us as we hold all of our doubts, our uncertainties, our confusion, while strengthening our faith through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus shares some things about God for us to know…God has come among us, God’s loves all of humanity, God is especially present in times of human suffering, God points us toward one another in relationship, care and concern. At the same time, there is so much we don’t know or understand, so much that remains a mystery. But that is why God is God and we are not. So we stand in awe of the mystery, like Peter, James and John, we worship our mysterious, loving God, we give thanks that God will be with us as we hold space for mystery and unanswered questions in our faith and are guided by the Holy Spirit to live out our faith by loving others as God loves us. Amen.