

Vocation and transformation

By [Bruce G. Epperly](#)

February 1, 2010

According to the [Pew Forum](#), 49 percent of the U.S. public claims to have had a religious or mystical experience, defined as a “moment of sudden religious insight or awakening.” This is good but challenging news to today’s spiritual leaders and preachers, since a growing number of these “mystics” define themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Many people, including regular church attendees, believe that the last place they might encounter the holy in a dramatic way is at church.

As a theologian interested in healing and wholeness, spiritual practices and spiritual formation, I’ve observed the insights of the Pew report firsthand. Many church members find that yoga, energy work, Buddhist meditation, stress reduction practices and creative visualization exercises are more relevant to their daily spirituality than the pastor's preaching or Bible studies.

This week’s readings provide the preacher with an opportunity to reflect on her or his own spiritual experiences, ponder Christian spiritual practices and open the door for church members to share and honor one another’s experiences of the divine. Perhaps the pastor or someone else from the congregation might even offer a class on Christian meditation or mysticism to complement the week’s lectionary themes.

Isaiah experiences the grandeur of God. Peter encounters the surprises of revelation. Paul discovers that God can transform us even when we are fleeing from Christ’s presence. These mystical experiences became central to their understandings of God and vocation.

If the scriptures are to be the source of a living word for us today, and not just a bygone era piece irrelevant to 21st-century people, then there must be continuity between their mysticism and what we might experience ourselves. The omnipresent and omni-active God can show up anywhere in our lives, and when this happens we are *changed*. (I try to present a theologically grounded and socially responsible path

to transformation in [*Holy Adventure*](#).)

This week's readings invite us to see the church as a laboratory of spiritual experience where people come to expect transformation. Dare we assert that the one who calls us to live justly also calls us to live mystically? Dare we make contemplation, along with action, a priority in the life of the church?