

Transfiguration Sunday. The scripture text is taken from Mark 9:2-9

Mountains play a large part in the history of Israel. It was on a mountain top that Abraham proved his faith in God, by preparing to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice.

It was on a mountain top that Moses encountered God for the first time and later received the 10 commandments; and on the same mountain top, God later revealed Himself to Moses.

It was on a mountain top, that Elijah overcame the prophets of Baal and on a different mountain top, again, that Elijah encountered God.

And of course, Jerusalem was established on Mount Zion. So, it is not by chance that Jesus takes His inner circle up on a mountain top, to witness what will be a most significant moment in their apprenticeship.

Jesus takes His three disciples with Him up to a high mountain by themselves. This was not for the crowds to see, not even for the other nine disciples to see.

This is an event that is mainly for Jesus, but that needs to be witnessed by these three, so they can tell people about it, after His resurrection.

While they are there, the writer of Luke's Gospel tells us, (this is in chapter 9, verse 29): "And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white."

The implication is that this is a manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus. The shining of Jesus' face, is like the change that came over Moses, when he had spoken to God on Mount Sinai. It is, as though Jesus is transported into the presence of God.

The bright clothes (the bright-white color) are a sign of purity and of God's glory, like the description given of the angels of God.

So what's happening, is that the three disciples are given a brief glimpse of a reality beyond their human experience, a hint of the true nature of this man, called Jesus, that they have only recently proclaimed to be the Messiah.

All three of the synoptic gospel writers place this transfiguration event, immediately after Peter's confession of faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and for the purpose of His coming into this world.

The disciples were distressed at the fact that Jesus would immediately begin to talk about His death. But they needed to realize that there was more to Jesus than they would so far have perceived; that their human perceptions were so far short of the mark, that they needed to rethink them.

But perhaps Jesus, also needed the reassurance that His understanding was correct. Here was Jesus proclaiming the way of the cross, and those nearest to Him, were telling Him, that He must be mistaken, there has to be some other way.

Remember, Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. He had a divine insight into His future path, but He also had the human limitations of not knowing for certain what was ahead.

So when His disciples started to question what He was thinking, perhaps, He needed to be re-assured.

Remember in the gospel stories, how Jesus told Peter, "To get behind me Satan?" As though Peter is acting as Satan's mouth piece, trying to put doubt in Jesus' mind.

Don't you and I sometimes experience that sort of doubt? As human nature would have it, yes, at times, we have our doubts, about God, about Jesus, about God's Holy Spirit, and devil will do all that he can to make us, doubt God all the more.

You know that the devil is very subtle, and very sly, he will do all that he can, to make us doubt, and to question God, and God's purpose and goodness for our lives.

This is why it is so important to come to church, to grow, and to maintain that fellowship with other Christians, so as to re-affirm our faith, and to ref-affirm each other in the faith.

Because if we don't, then the doubts and pressures of this world will wear us down. Otherwise, those who doubt the truth of the gospel, some of whom, you may even know in the church, will begin to undermine your faith.

We need to be reminded constantly, of the God, who came into this sinful and fallen world and died for each of us, so that we would not be lost for all eternity, but rather by His death upon the cross, and His resurrection over death, we have the victory over sin, death and the devil.

Just because we follow Christ in faith, life is not always going to be "smooth sailing" so to speak. We need to be reminded, that serving Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ is worth the price, in other words, dealing with what the world will throw at you.

So too, perhaps, Jesus needed to be reassured and His, "resolve" strengthened for the task that lay ahead.

And so God sends His servants: Moses and Elijah to speak with Jesus upon the mountain top. The writer of Mark's Gospel doesn't mention this, but the writer of Luke's Gospel does, and that is about Jesus' "departure"

What this means, is Jesus' "exodus" at Jerusalem, which only Jesus can fulfill. (in other words, His death upon the cross and His resurrection). Now these two men are significant, because of who they represent.

Moses represents the Law, which Jesus has come to fulfill, but Moses is also the forerunner of Jesus, the one who first brought his people out of slavery into the freedom of the promised land.

It was under Moses, that the people of Israel became a nation. So too, under Jesus, people would be freed, from the slavery of sin, and a new nation would be formed.

Now Elijah, on the other hand, represented the prophets, those whom God had sent to call His people back to Himself.

Jesus had come to provide the true way that people could be brought back to God. Elijah's coming was to be the sign of the coming of God's Kingdom which Jesus was now bringing in.

As well as, all of this, both Moses and Elijah had made an unusual departure in this life. Moses died just before the Israelites were to enter into the promised land. Elijah did not die, but he was actually taken up, alive, into heaven.

These two men, more than any other, were qualified to minister to Jesus, as Jesus contemplated all that lay before Him. These two men represented all of God's painstaking care and preparation for the fulfillment of His plan, for His people.

Well, this event was too much for Peter. Peter is so overwhelmed by the situation, that he blurts out the first thing that comes into his head, “hey let’s put up three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!”

Is Peter perhaps, thinking memorials? In other words, some way to capture the moment and preserve it. That is a natural response of the human heart, to want to, preserve a supernatural moment and tie it down and come back to it later.

But as we heard the account from Mark, we realize, just how inadequate such a gesture would be. Remember, God forbid the use of idols because no idol could possibly represent His power and glory, so no memorial, or even a “make-shift” memorial, could possibly capture the significance and the wonder of what was happening here.

And now, a cloud comes down and envelopes them. What does that remind you of? It sounds like the story from the Book of Exodus where Moses is on Mount Sinai and is surrounded by a cloud, waiting to receive the “Ten Commandments” on tablets of stone, while the Israelites are off making a golden calf, or idol for themselves.

In our story for today, out of the cloud, a voice that is loud and clear says: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.” (verse 7)

This is the icing on the cake, isn’t it? If we were in any doubt, about the significance of all of this, that doubt is removed by this word from God Himself.

God makes it very clear, right here, Jesus is His Son, Jesus is not just some wonder worker, or some great teacher, or just a prophet, this is the very Son of God, who has come into this world, to bring salvation to all people and to be crowned king of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, Listen to Him!

And then as quickly as it happened it is over with. The cloud lifts, and it is just Jesus standing there. The disciples must have thought that this was this a dream, was this an illusion? It all seemed so real, but was it?

But how would the disciples know? Well, the truth is they won’t know until after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when they will see the evidence right before their very eyes, that this event was not a dream, but that it was true,

What God gave them, those few disciples, the early church, and us, was a “pre-view” so to speak, of what the resurrected and glorified Christ would look like. In other words, what the resurrected body would look like.

And so Jesus, tells them, to tell no-one about what they have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.

The disciples of course don’t understand what Jesus is talking about. They wonder, in fact, if perhaps, if He is referring to Elijah rising from the dead to prepare the way for the Christ?

So how do you think the disciples felt as they came down the mountain with Jesus? Were they exhilarated by the events that they had just witnessed? Or were they just confused?

Were they aware of the privilege they had been given of being present, when Jesus’ glory was revealed in this way?

What about Jesus? Was He encouraged and strengthened by this encounter? Did Jesus come down the mountain with a renewed energy and enthusiasm for the tasks that lay ahead?

That's how we so often, come back from a mountain top experience isn't it? But so often, we are back for such short time, just before reality sets in.

There's some crisis at home, or someone immediately challenges our faith, or someone says something that makes us wonder whether it was all real. And that's what happens here.

As hear the story of the "transfiguration event" in the life of Jesus, and we may ask what does this means for us?

If you think about it, mountain-top experiences are great things, but when you come down from the mountain-top, into the valley of every day life, into the real-world, into a broken and hurting world where the glory of God is sometimes hidden, what then?

Then the question is whether we remember and trust, what we have discovered on the mountain-top. That everything is possible for those who believe in Jesus Christ, because Jesus is far more powerful than anything we could ever imagine.

That was the lesson the disciples needed to take with them from the mountain-top of the transfiguration.

This Jesus that they were following transcends any categories they may have had for him. Christ Jesus is the Son of God. Everything is possible for Him, because the name of Jesus is far above every other name in heaven and on earth.

And when those times come where God's answer isn't the one we had hoped for, we need to remember even more clearly what we saw on the mountain-top: that Christ Jesus is the Lord, the sovereign Son of God, who came to die for us, so that He could change the future forever and who rose from the tomb to assure us, that His mission had been completed, and now in the world we live in, this temporary world which will pass away, that there is a new life, an eternal life that will never pass away with God in heaven, awaiting us. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, You have given us a glimpse of your glory through the transfiguration of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Be with us, as we have come down from the mountain-top and back in the valley of life. Help us to remember, that through faith in Christ, all things have become new, and that through our faith in Him, He promised to never leave us or forsake us, in spite of what this world may throw at us. Reaffirm our faith, help us to be steadfast and faithful in our calling as disciples of Christ Jesus, so that we may further your kingdom here on earth. All these things, we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

