

Love Divine

(Only Jesus)

Exodus 34:29-30

Mark 9:2-9

Scripture Lesson from the OT: “And it happened when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai, that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with God. So, when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold the skin of his face shone and they were afraid to come near him.”

Scripture Lesson from the NT: “And six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves-and He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white. And Elijah appeared to them and Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah” for he did not know what to say because they were terrified. Then a cloud formed overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud saying, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” All at once they looked around and saw only Jesus. And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God.

Let me tell you a “school story” about a teacher and His students. One day they decided to take a hike together up in the hills outside Jerusalem. Taking a hike together on a sunny day was not unusual for them. Walking along the mountain paths of Judea was something that they did together quite often. Sometimes the teacher would take the whole class, sometimes only a few students would be invited. On this particular day, the teacher asked only His three best students to hike with Him.

It wasn't really a difficult hike; it was really more of a leisurely walk and talk as they made their way up the hill to the top of the mountain.

Once they arrived at the top, they took a few moments to catch their breath as they rested in preparation for the walk back down into the valley.

That was when something happened that marked this hike as being different from all the rest. The “something” that happened was difficult to describe in words and hard for them to understand. However, all of them were moved in unknown ways that would later prove to be both deep and profound.

Afterwards, as they were heading home, the teacher told them to not speak of what had happened to anyone else “until the Son of Man should rise from the dead” (Mark 9:9). They weren’t sure at the time why He would have wanted it to be this way, but they accepted His reasons and respected His command. They were very careful not to tell anyone about what they had seen.

However, they also knew that something amazing had happened unlike anything they had ever seen before. It would be a long time before the three students that were with Him on the mountaintop would tell the others what happened that day.

Then one day when the disciples were all together Peter says, “Y’all remember that day when John, James and I went up to the mountain top with Jesus on our way back from Caesarea Philippi?” Yes, of course they remembered. And even though it had been a long time since, they still wondered about what took place on that afternoon. As the others moved in closer to listen, Peter began to tell his story. We find the written record of his account in Mark’s gospel chapter 9:2.

“And six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter, John and James and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.

And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For they did not know what to say because they were terrified. Then a cloud formed overshadowing them and a voice came out of the cloud saying, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.”

And suddenly they looked around and saw only Jesus. And as they were coming down the mountain, He gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”

Now, it is unusual for Mark to make time references in his gospel, so I kind of got to wondering why he mentions the timeframe of the story to be specifically six days after the events highlighted in the first verse.

I wondered, could it have been because he wanted to remind his Jewish readers that Moses waited on Mt. Sinai for six days (Exodus 34:5) before God met with him in the cloud to receive the Ten commandments. You will notice that the parallels between these two events are, after all strikingly similar.

Some additional examples of the parallels may be noted in the dazzling brilliance of Jesus' clothing compared to the same brilliance of Moses face, and also in the clouds that cover the mountain tops. The fact that both men met God in the clouds on the mountaintop tells us that all these details play an important part in their respective stories.

Many scholars have looked at Mark as a sort of "first draft gospel" that Matthew and Luke would later edit and finish. If this is true, I think it is interesting, even "re-markable" (no pun intended) that so much care was taken by Mark to write the story in such a way as to make these connections.

We should also note that Mark writes the transfiguration of Jesus smack-dab in the middle of his gospel as the pivotal hinge between the beginning of Jesus' ministry with His baptism and its ending with the resurrection. And further, we should note Mark's not so subtle hint that all of the covenant promises of the law and the prophets that were represented in the ministries of Moses and Elijah are now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

All these images of dazzling brilliance flashing against the cloudy darkness speak to us of the God of eternity breaking into our temporal world revealing to us that His Kingdom is right here in the "person" of Christ Jesus, His beloved Son!

In Revelation 21:3 we read, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people."

In this text we read that God wants to build a tabernacle or "pitch his tent" and camp out with His people. To celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles, or "Succoth" as it is called, the people would pitch tents, or temporary shelters in memory of the forty years they wandered in the wilderness.

After this fashion traditional Jewish orthodoxy believed that during this festival the Messiah's appearance on earth would occur as a sign for the ending of the world. Through our understanding of this tradition, we can see why Peter would have suggested the building of "booths" or "tabernacles" or "tents" to celebrate the coming of the Messiah on the holy mountain as being a sign of the end times when God would come down from heaven to live forever with His people.

However, it seems from Peter's telling of the event that his suggestion for them to do this came more from the sheer terror of the supernatural aspect of the event than it was from its practical application to any human experience.

I mean, how would any of us define our emotion when we experience a supernatural event that is unexplainable? The gospel has one word for it: "terror." The disciples weren't merely frightened by what they experienced up there on the mountaintop, they were terrified!

Friends, I believe we all love God, and we all love the thought of being together in His presence someday. Most of us are enjoying the life we have enough as it is to wait on that day for a little while longer if possible. This being the case, when God shows up in a tangible way that may be known and described by our five senses, to put a fine point on it, it usually scares the hell out of us or the heaven into us, and possibly a little of both!

This is because the fabric that separates the world of the profane from the world of the sacred is torn asunder when this happens, and God's sacred holiness floods over into our world and baptizes us with holy truth beyond our ability to fully comprehend what has happened. When this occurs, all we can do is try to explain it away by reducing it to the level of our own comprehension and give it a simple meaning to better understand it.

Back in the late "1970's" a movie came out called "*O God*" starring George Burns and John Denver. In the movie God comes to earth in the person of comedian George Burns to give the people of the world his message about how they should live and what he wants them to do.

He chooses Jerry, a grocery store manager (John Denver) to be his messenger. Near the end of the movie, Jerry (Denver) is dragged into court and charged with slander because of some negative comments he had made about a corrupt

televangelist. The law of the land is against him and things are looking pretty bad for God and Jerry. That was when God decided to reveal himself to everyone present in the courtroom.

So, in walks God (George Burns as himself) and taking the stand, does a flashy card trick for the judge. Of course, the judge is not impressed with God's sleight-of-hand, so God says, "OK, your honor, here is a trick I'll bet you've never seen before" and with that gets up from the witness chair, makes himself invisible and walks down the aisle to the back of the courtroom, says a few more words in support of his message and his messenger and then mysteriously departs.

In disbelief, the prosecuting attorney and the judge desperately search for any remaining physical evidence that might explain what they all experienced but could not prove had happened, including the stenographic and audio tape recordings of the proceedings, all to no avail. They are left to finally conclude that what they all saw had happened, or thought had happened, did not in fact happen at all, and that it would be best to say nothing more about it.

It was at just this moment, when the disciples thought things couldn't possibly get scarier than they already were that a voice comes out of the cloud repeating the same words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism in the beginning of His ministry. "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

The only difference from the first time is that this time the voice adds a command imperative for the disciples to "listen to Him."

This time God says because I am well pleased with my Son, you need to listen to Him. God says, "If you won't listen to me, which you won't, or you won't listen to John the Baptist, or your preacher, which you haven't, please listen to Him."

Listen to Jesus, you must hear Him and believe Him.

When He tells you that He came to die for your sins, you must believe Him.

When He tells you that He will suffer and die from the hands of religious people like you, you must believe Him.

When He tells you that He is calling you as a Christian to come and die with Him, you must believe Him.

This was not the message that the disciples and the people wanted to hear from their Messiah on the mountain, and it is not the message that y'all want to hear coming from your pastor this morning, but it is God's message to you, and you must listen to it if you expect to see Jesus on the mountain. Jesus is God's beloved Son, and God is very well pleased with Him!

On the mountaintop Peter, John and James found themselves to be in the epicenter of the greatest paradox in human history. Jesus was God, they had seen it for themselves with their own eyes. But what they as yet could not see was that He was also a man that must soon suffer and die a painful death on the cross. As to how this paradoxical dichotomy could be true, had yet to be revealed to them.

And indeed, the Anointed One of God, the Messiah, would come in the flesh and be lifted up as the prophets had foretold, but not on a royal throne as the world defines a king, but on an old, rugged cross wearing a crown of thorns instead of a crown of gold. That dull and drab piece of old wood at Calvary would be His glory as much as would be the dazzling white robe He wore at the transfiguration.

In Mark 9:8 we read, "And all at once they looked around and saw only Jesus."

Only Jesus could hold these opposing points of tension together in balance at the epicenter of this paradox.

Only Jesus could hold the keys to both life and death in perfect balance.

Only Jesus understood the perfect relationship that was needed between life and death to create bodily resurrection. They looked around and saw, "only Jesus"!

Here at the very heart of Mark's gospel, the transfiguration of Jesus gave the disciples a picture of resurrection glory that went beyond the limit of human understanding. A preview of coming attractions that would soon become a reality for every believer.

Of course, it made no sense to them then, and they did not understand it. And it would not make sense to them until after they had been to the tomb on Easter morn and seen it for themselves. I believe that this was why Jesus gave orders to them in vs. 9 not to tell anyone "Until the Son of Man should rise from the dead."

Here's the thing folks, there are times when our minds may be asleep to the truth that is right before our eyes, but when our hearts are awakened to that which we have already seen, there comes a wonderful moment (Aha!) when the head awakes to what our heart already knows, and they connect in a completeness of understanding that changes our life in an instant.

Because the act of transfiguration is at the heart or epicenter of life where only Jesus holds the balance of life and death, and it is at this single moment in place and time where we recognize that there is only Jesus, and Jesus is all there is, at this moment, like Him, we too become transfigured!

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 the apostle Paul writes, "But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as from the Lord the spirit."

Friends of God, this is the good news for today! Because Jesus became the Father's glory on the mountaintop, we are also becoming the Father's glory down in the valley! Becoming the Father's glory may happen in us in only small increments over the course of a lifetime, but we can have and know the blessed assurance that change is happening even now and is at work in us today!

Mark's gospel is so beautiful because it has a single purpose, and that is to convince the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If we believe in our hearts and confess with our tongues that this is true than what does this story of Jesus' transfiguration mean for us, and our own transfiguration?

Frederick, the Elector of Saxony having made a promise of repentance from his sin in a fit of sickness, one day asked Martin Luther how he might be sure his repentance was real. Luther answered him by saying, "If you are as careful to perform in your health as you were careful to promise in your sickness, I believe you may most assuredly draw that inference."

Friends, we are about to enter the season of Lent, a time to reflect on our own walk with the teacher. A time when we try to grow closer to God and become a more faithful follower of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lent is a season of pondering, to be sure, but it is also a time when we look deeply into our hearts to yet see what might be there that holds us back in our relationship with God.

Lent is the season where we search out all of our little “peccadillos” and repent from the sins that we have allowed to come between us and the God who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Lent is a time for us to live into the paradox of transfiguration in the knowledge that we are as yet a broken and sinful people, and that we who have stood with Christ on the mountaintop and now must walk with Him back down to the valley.

During this coming season of Lent, it is my prayer that we will come down from the mountaintop into the valley with a new vision of our transfigured Lord such that no matter where we look, we see only Jesus.

Can y’all say amen to that? “Amen” and amen.