

Bound For Glory
Mark 9:2-9
February 14, 2021
Transfiguration Sunday

Transfiguration Sunday is a transition Sunday. It is a bridge over which we walk to get to the season of Lent, but we're not always sure we want to cross it. After all, after the transfiguration comes Lent, and talk about discipline, prayer, fasting and repentance, and finally, death on a cross. But today is the day we hear the story about the transfiguration of our Lord.

Mark tells us that,

Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 9:2-7

"This *is* my Son, the Beloved; *listen* to him!" Mark 9:7 The first thing to note about the Transfiguration is that it is a time to listen for the voice of God. When Peter didn't know what to do, he *talked*. He was sometimes impetuous. He said the first thing that came to mind.

Peter, when you don't know what to do, *listen!* Listen to God's *Son*. That's great advice! Our lives would be simplified if when we do not know what to do, we would listen to Jesus. There is nothing wrong with silence. How many mistakes would we avoid? How much wisdom would we gain? How much joy could we experience if we would just listen to Jesus and let him guide us?

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I have been fortunate to have numerous mountaintop experiences in my life – some large and some small, and I bet you have too. You don't even have to go to a mountaintop. Sometimes all you have to do is go in your own backyard.

The most significant mountaintop experience for me was when our family traveled to the island of Iona off the coast of Scotland in 2012. Like any transforming experience in our life, it was many faceted, and keeps revealing inspiration and new spiritual insights to this day.

It was a place where God's glory shined for me like the sun. The very soil has been trod by saints and pilgrims for centuries, for they recognized it as a thin place where heaven and earth met. The time we spent in the Abbey and walking the

island was a holy and glorious experience that brought to my mind the experience Peter, James and John experienced on the mountaintop. It was a mountaintop experience was on an island, in fact, the entire island is only three square miles.

These epiphanies don't last very long, but their effects can last a lifetime. They guide us through the rough times when our lives are troubled and chaotic. They can even help us through a pandemic. A transfiguring moment will sustain us and give us strength when we falter.

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How about you? What have been some of your transfiguring moments? I had a conversation with someone many years ago in one of my churches. He said, "Pastor, I'm feeling empty these days. I don't feel like God is active in my life, and he hasn't spoken to me in years."

I thought about that later, and it haunted me. Today I might say, did you wake up this morning and put one foot in front of another? Did you give your wife of 30, 40 or 50 years a hug and a kiss and tell her you loved her? Did you ever think about your children or grandchildren, and say to yourself, "Gee, I'm really proud that they're growing up to be such fine young adults?" Did you walk outside and see the sun shining this morning? And the stars and moon by night? Did you listen as the family gathered around the dinner table and hear how God was at work in their life? Might be a bit of glory there, brought down from the mountaintop.

There's a miracle every moment. Sometimes I think we're on a train bound for glory, and don't even know it. Do you remember that song by Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions called People Get Ready?

(Sung)

People get ready
 There's a train a comin'
 You don't need no baggage
 You just get on board
 All you need is faith
 To hear the diesel's hummin'
 You don't need no ticket
 You just thank the Lord.

Sometimes we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel because we're blind and our eyes are shut tight. At times we can't hear God's words to us because our ears are plugged as we're bombarded by the noise that constantly surrounds us, and that's all we hear.

If we're going to thrive and not merely survive, we need to see God's glory and hear God's words spoken to us. We need to see kindness and generosity reflected through others. We're like Peter, and don't fully appreciate the presence of God when we're surrounded by glory. A mountaintop experience is not meant to last forever, but the benefits do.

Peter missed the point. He wanted to pitch a tent on the mountaintop and camp out. He didn't want to leave. That's not what Jesus intended. The time came for the disciples to go back down the mountain – into the valley of their daily lives. They encountered a father who came pleading for his epileptic son. The disciples had tried to heal the boy, but could not. Now the father was asking Jesus for help.

The disciples had enjoyed the solitude and beauty of the mountaintop. They had enjoyed the company of Moses and Elijah. Coming down from the mountain was a “come-down” indeed, and they did not act as if they had been transformed. They did not use the authority and power that had been given them.

It wouldn't be surprising if sometimes it is that way for us too. We have mountaintop experiences: we hear a favorite hymn, or remember when the choir sang a favorite anthem before we shut down last year; or someone tells you how God changed her life, or a healthcare worker goes the extra mile to take care of someone you love.

It might be tempting to stop the clock and capture the special moment, just like Peter wanted to do. We can *visit* the mountaintop, but we can't live there. Nor should we. Moses went up to Mountain Sinai to receive the commandments, but when he came back down, the people had made a golden calf as an idol to another God.

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Getting back to Jesus and the disciples, a curious thing happened to them. Jesus ordered the disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen and heard until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Maybe it was because the disciples couldn't see the whole picture. Maybe Jesus knew there would be a mob scene around them at the bottom of the mountain. Maybe they wouldn't understand the meaning of the transfiguration until they experienced the resurrection. Nevertheless, the experience the disciples witnessed surely must have transformed them. This story was so significant that it would appear in three of the four gospels. It stayed with them and became a part of their ministry to others.

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We are about to enter the season of Lent – a time when we prepare for the death of Jesus, and for the unavoidable valleys and dark times in our own life. Some would say we have been living in dark times for a year now, and they would be right.

The disciples had their mountaintop experience. They didn't realize it at the time, but it was to be a well of strength to help them endure the rocky road ahead. That's why God wants to give us a mountaintop experiences. Whenever you read something in the gospels, it is a living word addressed to *you* in that moment from the Christ who wants to give you hope and strength.

As we begin Lent, I hope you will join us in the Zoom Lenten reflection series starting this Wednesday, and running for the seven weeks of Lent. We will consider passages from the gospels related to Lent, and illuminated by the poetry of Mary Oliver.

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In summary, we need to stop, look and listen, for we are surrounded by God's glory everyday. Some moments might shine brighter than others, but it can illuminate your life nevertheless. I bet we will read stories in the months ahead about people whose faith and the power of prayer helped them navigate through the dark days and valleys of the pandemic.

We all need that mountaintop experience – if only for an instant to see us through. One morning last week, I noticed some daffodils poking up at the edge of my yard. It took my breath away. The next morning, they were in bloom. It was a transfiguring moment tinged by the glory of God. Where have you seen the glory of God today? Once you've had a mountaintop experience, you'll never be the same, and there's plenty to go around.

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In conclusion, I remember Martin Luther King's words from his last speech before he was assassinated. It reminded me of the mountaintop and the transfiguration. He spoke those unforgettable lines. It was obvious he had seen God's glory and was transformed. He declared: "And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land."

Let's go to the mountaintop, and behold the glory of God. God in Jesus Christ makes it abundantly clear -- we're bound for glory. Let's not miss a moment. Amen

Mark 9:2-9

9:2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

9:3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

9:4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

9:5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

9:6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

9:7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

9:8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9:9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.