

**Mark 9:2-9**

<sup>2</sup>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, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>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.” <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. <sup>9</sup>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.

**Pray:** O God of glory, O God of the mountaintop, O God still speaking, still revealing, still dazzling us with the power of your transforming love, reveal your Word to us this morning. Let us see and hear it, but also help us to truly listen to your voice, to make it a part of who we are, who we can be. Help us, O Lord, to live the Word. Amen.

This morning, we have the transfiguration of Jesus up on the mountaintop, that pinnacle moment of revealing glory, witnessing the Son of Man in all glory, hearing the voice of God, asking us to *listen* to the Christ and make his way, his teaching, his path, his life, even his death and resurrection part of our very lives.

As all of you know, next Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, Ash Wednesday. And traditionally, the Sunday just before Lent is known as transfiguration Sunday. Further, this Gospel reading, or a one similar from Matthew or Luke is always read on this Sunday, for just as it marks the transition from epiphany to Lent, for Jesus, it marks a clear turning point in his ministry. You see, it’s at this time that Jesus clearly starts to anticipate his death as his eyes turn towards Jerusalem. Perhaps the cross was always before him, but according to Mark, a brief sequence of events have started which mark this transition and point to this moment of revelation. It’s at this instance, that Jesus is revealed to his closest friends in complete and utter glory as the Christ. Certainly, they have been aware of Jesus’ power all along, but this experience is different, and the way the entire Gospel story is told, this moment of transfiguration stands out as pinnacle.

Let us look more closely at the story from Mark. Jesus has been healing and teaching. And then Jesus asks his disciples who the people say that he is. Although the people are saying such names as John the Baptist, Elijah, or some of the other prophets, Peter confesses that he believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Next, for the first time in Mark, Jesus tells them how “the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the leaders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31). If you recall, this is when Peter sort of pulled Jesus aside and started to rebuke him, and you get the scene with Jesus saying, “Get behind me Satan!” followed by the command to deny yourself and pick up your cross and follow Jesus. You see, that is immediately before this scene of transfiguration, and it points to an unbelievable moment of revelation and glory.

Only Peter, James, and John, the inner circle of disciples and Jesus' closest friends, are allowed to accompany Jesus up the mountain to witness the miracle of transfiguration. There upon the mountain, Jesus is transformed. His clothes become dazzling white, brighter than anything the disciples had ever seen, and Jesus is filled with glory. Two other people show up—Moses and Elijah, and the three begin to converse. All along, Peter and James and John stand aback, observing this glorious encounter. And can you hear Peter's confusion? Can you sense his terror and fear? He doesn't know what to do, so he clumsily asks if he should construct three dwelling places on the face of the mountain, tents to house this revealed glory. But before he can get an answer, this great cloud comes down and begins to overshadow them. With this, I am sure, the three disciples were about freaking out. And then you get the voice, the voice of the Most High, the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Now, to a Jew, these events would not only have been unbelievable miracles, but they would have been familiar signs of God's revelation and glory. First of all, there is the mountain. Ever heard of a mountaintop experience, an experience so profound, so transforming, so amazing that you are never quite the same? It was on a mountain that Moses saw the burning bush, was commissioned to deliver the people of Israel, bring them out of bondage and into the promised land, and it was on a mountain that the Israelites received the Ten Commandments—the Word as presented in the Bible. Something BIG was about to happen, some kind of revelation. The Word was going to be revealed.

Next, consider the dazzling white clothes, which connote glorification. The glorious, dazzling light, so blinding, so powerful, a light not accessible to human beings. And the cloud? Remember how God used to talk to Moses in the cloud, and when he would come down off the mountain his face would light up like the sun because he was in the presence of God's glory? With all of these signs and wonders, the three disciples would have certainly gotten the point that this was indeed, a moment of intense glory and revelation.

But just as quick as it began, the moment is over. Suddenly, the beings are gone, the cloud has disappeared, and Jesus is back to his normal self.

It's not very often that we witness the revelation of God in such a spectacular way. Most often, it seems to me that we catch only glimpses of God, snapshots of the divine that allow us to see into the heart of Jesus. Further, often we have to be very attentive, keep our eyes open and listen intently, to witness God's glory. Seldom are we consciously overwhelmed by the glory of our Lord.

It's interesting to me that at first, all the signs and wonders are visual, things you see. The mountain, the whiteness and light, seeing Moses and Elijah and the cloud, and even at the end when all is done, seeing just Jesus. But though we start with the visual, where is the emphasis placed in the story? Not on seeing at all, but on listening. "Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'" (Mark 9:7). Listen to Him!

Often I think we forget about this vital response to the Word. Oh sure, we want the glory, the forgiveness, the love and mercy, peace and justice, the transforming grace, but we don't always do very well with living the Gospel, do we? We want the glory, we want to see it, to experience it, but we want the glory *without* the message we *must* hear! A message we must hear and follow!

My friends, the two cannot be separated—you can't have the glory of Jesus without listening to him, without the path of discipleship. You can't have the glory without the cross.

Many know that I have always been fond of the band Creed. Just this week, I played the song, *The Faceless Man*, which details a remarkable encounter between the singer and what I have come to understand as Jesus the Christ. I thought of this song when considering the transfiguration and the ways the Word is revealed in our lives.

The song begins with a description of what I would call escape. The singer has to sort of “get away” from it all, and has gone out into nature to reconnect, to find some peace and solace. And I think many of us can identify with that—the rancher who finds solace alone on the tractor, the hunter who likes his time in the deer stand, the camper out in the wilderness starrng up at the stars, the hiker taking a trek through the countryside.

I spent a day by the river  
It was quiet and the wind stood still  
I spent some time with nature  
To remind me of all that's real  
It's funny how silence speaks sometimes when you're alone  
And remember that you feel

Again I stand; Lord I stand, against the Faceless Man

You see, my friends, in that moment of connection, when the Word is revealed, Jesus comes and speaks a word of grace, a word of empowerment, a word of truth, dropping the blinders from our eyes, and revealing his Holy presence. The song continues as the writer describes this “faceless man.”

Now I saw a face on the water  
It looked humble but willing to fight  
I saw the will of a warrior  
His yoke is easy and His burden is light  
He looked me right in the eyes  
Direct and concise to remind me  
To always do what's right

Again I stand; Lord I stand, against the Faceless Man

There are moments, my friends, when God has a way of looking straight through you, straight through to the heart of a man. It is a moment that defines you, a vision that enlightens you, a moment when your very soul witnesses the power of God. That's what it was like for those early disciples, and that's what God is trying to reveal to all of us in Jesus the Christ. It's like a moment when the whole world disappears, and you are left standing, alone, stripped of everything that you ever were, down on your knees before the glory of the Lord, and Jesus looks you in the face, eye to eye, direct and concise and says, “follow me,” a moment when the Word is revealed. The song continues:

'Cause if the face inside can't see the light I know  
I'll have to walk alone  
And if I walk alone to the other side I know  
I might not make it home

Again I stand; Lord I stand, against the Faceless Man

You see, the writer knows the power of Christ, that you either say, "yes" to God and put the Lord first in your life, or you walk alone. Discipleship puts you on the path of God, a path that is never lonely, for Jesus walks beside all of us, and it is a path that leads to eternal life.

It's at this point that the song really begins to build in volume and tempo; it is a rock song after all. It's like the music builds and builds like the rush of a mighty wind, the coming of the Spirit, the movement of the Lord, and then right when it is at its peak, right at the crescendo, suddenly there comes a peace. The music settles down, and the writer says:

Next time I see this face  
I'll say I choose to live for always  
So won't you come inside  
And never go away.

My friends, when the moments of transfiguration come into our lives, when the Word is revealed, when we see our Lord in all his glory, there upon a cross, begging us all to follow, may our very souls say yes to God.

You know, my friends, there are many, many ways we see the light of Christ and the power of God. Some, like me, might see God often in Nature, but Christ is just as present in our own lives. From chicken-foot games to quilt-making afternoons to chili/chicken stew meals, to gatherings of every kind, the Lord is with us—in our worship, in our joys and sorrows, from every funeral to every Baptism, and every remembrance of the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present.

God is out there, folks, loving us, caring for us, even during the times we can't see or are blinded by our own faults and sins. God cares for us and shows us his glory from time to time, revealing the Word, reminding us of his redeeming nature and the salvation he offers us.

But we must remember those words of command, of purpose, the Word revealed. "Listen to him," the voice of God reminds us. Listen to him. When the Glory of God is revealed, when the Word is revealed, what are you going to do? Just see it? Yes, very good—stand in awe at the glory of God, in utter amazement, to be touched by glory, by divine providence, to witness Holy Power in our midst. But if you do not listen to Jesus, then you've missed the point. Listen to him, my friends, listen and follow, follow and find the life, the eternal life, grounded in Jesus Christ. Amen.