

Dane Wood
Mark 9:2-9
Transfiguration Sunday

Sermon 14 February 2021 - Seeing

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the Epiphany season, which began on January 6th. Epiphany is the time of the church year where we focus on discovery and revelation. Christ is born at Christmas and this season is our first chance to see something new in the world. A change started on Christmas day and our scriptures these past weeks have focused on showing where these changes come from. We read these stories in Mark about the life of Jesus, learning new things about him and about ourselves. We witness in these stories how Jesus was baptized, and the cleansing waters of the river Jordan. We've seen Jesus call up normal men, uneducated, hardworking blue-collar fishermen to be his disciples, showing us how all people are called to his service in some form or fashion. Then Jesus showed us miracles, of healing and exorcism, going to people in need and restoring them in body, mind, soul, and in the community. Everywhere that Jesus went he went preaching and casting out demons. Then we end the season with one more huge revelation, one last epiphany before the season of Lent begins.

This event is central to the gospel stories, quite literally, in most cases it shows up right in the middle. When you write a story or book, the beginning and the end tend to be the most important parts. They are easy to find and remember when it comes to a bound book. But these gospels were originally written on scrolls. Imagine one big piece of paper, rolled up and meeting in the middle. So, when you open it, it's the first part you see... this middle section, and if you read it, you read the transfiguration. So just by where it shows up in the gospels, we know it is important. But then we are given even more clues to how big a deal this really is.

Jesus is transformed before the eyes of the disciples, shining brighter than if he was bleached white. The word “shining” here is unique because in Greek it is used only ever to describe the way in which the Sun shines, that glare you get when you look at the sun or see rays of light through the sky. Kind of a fun English pun when you think that this is the shining of the SUN and the SON. The point here in Greek is that this is unique, supernatural, unlike anything another human could do.

Then next to Christ are two persons, named Elijah and Moses. Moses is the “law-giver” of the Old Testament. If Abraham is the father of Israel, Moses is the Father of the Law, the Torah, the first 5 books. Elijah is the prophet, considered and called, the First Prophet. Elijah was known to be the greatest of all those who heard and spoke God’s Word to the people. He performed miracles throughout Israel, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and raising the dead. Sounds like someone else we might know.

Then to top it all off in this scripture, God speaks directly, the voice heard from a cloud. God does not speak directly very often in the New Testament, so when it does happen, you need to take note. All of these clues tell us just how important this event is, but what is really happening here?

The transfiguration is a confusing and mysterious story. Jesus and his pals go up on a mountain and then there is this wild scene, then they come back down, and Jesus says they can tell no one. Do what now? This is a tough story because it doesn’t really fit into our experience all that well. I’ve never been walking along on a mountain with my buds and had a vision quiet like this. God has never spoken to me through a cloud with a big booming voice, and I’ve never seen light shining out from someone the way that Jesus is described. I don’t know what Moses or Elijah look like, or even know as much about their lives as those in Ancient Jerusalem would

have. So, I'm a bit dumbfounded by this story, I can't seem to grab on to what is happening with Jesus. And that's OK!

What I can understand is Peter and his reactions. I love the gospel stories with Peter because if I don't really understand what's going on, or something is odd... Peter will be feeling the same thing. Here he's witnessing a transformation of Jesus, his friend and teacher. What he sees he does not understand. The light is blinding, Moses and Elijah are confusing, and the other disciples are silent as stones and pretty much not even in the story. So, Peter... being nervous, and scared... not having a clue what is going on, which is exactly how I feel some days... he opens his mouth and blurts out something silly. "Hey, great, we disciples here will build you three tabernacles, three tents, three shrines for y'all to stay in. I'm just gonna go over here and do that, cause... I need something to do with my hands and I have no idea what is happening right now." Anyone else ever feel like that? I know I do. When things are getting too crazy, just give me something I can work with to distract me.

Peter's reaction is not painted in a favorable light. Mark is trying to tell us that Peter messed up. Peter is trying to fix a problem that does not exist. He is an act first, think later kind of guy. I mean honestly... who just walks out of a perfectly good boat just because you saw someone else walking on water? It's a blessing and a curse for Peter. He is always trying to get to the action and skip the other parts. He rushes to what he knows, instead of being in the moment and possibly becoming more.

I know many of us can be the same way... I know I'm that way when Megan and I talk sometimes. She'll tell me about her day or about some issue and my first reaction is to say, "Well, you should have done this, that would fix your problem. Or just do this..." The problem is, she didn't tell me about her day or work or whatever so I would jump in and fix it, that would

be patronizing, no... she told me about these things so that I would listen... sometimes people just want to be seen and heard. Fixing everything is not our job, even though a part of me wants that so badly. I wish I could just fix hate and isms, just fix COVID and all the problems in the world. I can't do those things, not alone and not quickly. It takes God, other people, and time. It's the same of us, it was the same for the disciples.

The disciples had been on this journey with Jesus since the beginning. It's a year or two in at this point (hard to tell the time in the Gospel of Mark) and they have been high on life. They have seen miracle after miracle, heard every sermon, they have even preached and performed miracles themselves. Everything is great because there is so much to do! The Messiah will take his kingdom soon! But just before they take this trip to the mountain, Jesus tells the disciples something... He tells them he will die. This does not work for the disciples... they do not want to accept it, how can the dying Jesus fix things? Remove the Romans? Restore the Kingdom of David? They argue with Jesus and try to fix the problem offering solutions and work arounds, but it cannot be fixed. They go up on this mountain, high on the mountain with Christ. And there they are supposed to SEE Jesus as the Son of God, and HEAR it declared from God, they are supposed to take this in and still... Peter is trying to fix problems, let's get some tents and shrines, let's build this and do that... he's got to calm down. Peter has so many new ideas, such confidence in everything that Jesus has done so far, he feels the pull to just keep working hard, he must keep moving, he must keep fixing. That's why he asks to build these tents or shrines, he needs something to do. But Peter... but we... need to slow down because we can't work at full speed forever... and if we aren't prepared and rested, if we can See and Hear, if we aren't listening... how do we even know what work to do?

Yes, we are called to action by Jesus Christ. We are summoned to feed the hungry, heal the sick, cast out demons, speak in tongues, love our neighbors, make disciples, and change the world. This is exciting work. And there is exciting news that goes with it. Jesus is the Son of Man and Son of God and has come to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. Glorious days, but... we can't always just jump in, we need to prepare. Peter was not ready to fulfill his calling quiet yet. He was excited, he was eager, but he wasn't mature in his faith and he didn't really know yet what he believed. He was on the mountain in that moment, but there were lots of valleys in front of him, and he needed to take a breather.

The season of epiphany has been a time of excitement for us and the Church. Christ is revealed as our Messiah and we witness his miracles. We see the Light of World shining from God, through Jesus, and carried out by the Holy Spirit. However, we are like Peter in many ways, not yet ready to get to work... we need to slow down, we need to mature and ripen... we need to fast.

This is what the upcoming season of Lent is meant to do. It's here to slow us down a little. We get all excited by the miracles and events of Jesus life, but we need to remember that he has come to die for our sins. We need to take time to think and pray about our own faith and our relation to God. We need to stop working, so we can SEE and HEAR God. If we truly want to live up to our callings as Christian servants, then we need to be willing to take the necessary time to listen to God before we act.

We have seen the Light, it is shining in our hearts, it has lifted us high on the mountain... but it's time to come down. We need to spend time listening, praying, thinking... what is it that God is truly calling me to do, what is he calling us to do? How is God walking with us through this pandemic and where does God want us to go after it? That is the question we need on our

minds as we go into Lent this year. What is God's will for my life? And if you want to know, want to hear God speak to you, fast for Lent. Give something up that is important to you... something that you will notice that it is gone. And replace that object or practice with prayer. Lent is not the time to fix something, this isn't Christian self-help season. Giving up chocolate or soda, will not help your relationship with God. Getting off Facebook for 40 days won't help either. Not alone. Fasting works when you replace something with prayer, it gives you an opportunity to build your relationship with God. So, I invite you all to do that this year. Lent starts Wednesday. Give something up, and in its place, spend more time Seeing and Hearing God.