

SILENT! LISTEN! – Sermon on February 11, 2018 by Paula Kraus

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-10 - “This is my Son, whom I love, Listen to him”

In England there is a paper factory that makes the finest stationery in the world. One day a man touring the factory asked what it was made from. He was shown a huge pile of old rags and told that the rag content was what determined the quality of the paper. The visitor wouldn't believe it. A few weeks after his tour, he received from the company a package of paper with his initials embossed on it. On the top piece was written the words “Dirty rags transformed”

The same is true of the Christian life. It is a process of transformation from what we were into something new and wonderful.

This scripture is the story of the “Transfiguration” or Jesus transformation where his divine nature was allowed to shine through and was revealed to his most trusted disciples, Peter, John, and James. His clothing was transformed in to a whiteness symbolic of heaven, and symbolic of the total lack of sin or guilt.

Now, suddenly, appear Elijah and Moses to ‘talk with Jesus’. Why did Moses and Elijah then appear to Jesus?

Similar things to this transfiguration happened to Moses and Elijah as well, Moses transfiguration happened first when he encountered the burning bush but then again as he met God on Mount Sinai and received the Law from God – Exodus 34:29 – states “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.” Maybe Moses had to be there because he was the presenter of the Law to the Jewish People and now the law, with its commands, and its forbidding, was fulfilled in the Person of Jesus; and the law-giver Moses, by the will of God had left the heavenly places to greet upon the mount of transfiguration the One, Who in His own Person, had magnified the law, and made it honorable.

Also, Elijah, experienced that connection with God on Mount Horeb, which by the way is thought to be another name for Mount Sinai, however this was not an earth shattering experience but a still small voice as we read in 1 Kings 19:9-12

“. . . And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”

Elijah was there because every word that had passed the lips of Elijah in the olden days had been but the spelling out in simple speech, of that which was embodied in the Person of Christ; and he stood now upon the mountain to acknowledge that in this transfigured One, all the speech of heaven begins and ends, that in Him every prophecy of the past is fulfilled, and that the prophet of the days to come, will gather from this Man and His teaching, his inspiration and his power.

And, did you ever wonder what that conversation was about? According to Luke, chapter 9 verse 31 “They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” His departure from the earthly kingdom to again take his place in heaven and await his final return the Parousia. Maybe their purpose for speaking with Jesus was to instill some confidence in him and assure him that his father, GOD, was with him and would remain with him.

Now in verse seven we see that a cloud envelops the three, Moses, Jesus, and Elijah and from that cloud comes a voice. When those words “This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him” were spoken to the disciples it was so they would know the divine nature of Jesus.

This is also a story of a moment of conversion for those disciples – a powerful moment when the true nature and divinity of Jesus was shown to them – they stood before God in the divine form of Jesus. It is no surprise then what Peter’s reaction was even though we have learned that Peter was the leader of the group, the impetuous one, always the first to speak and question. We learn also if we look at verse 29 of the previous chapter in Mark, that Peter spoke for the other eleven disciples when he states that Jesus was “The Christ”, the anointed one, the Messiah.

But now we see that Peter responds with a banal suggestion because he really ‘didn’t know what to say’. Peter - struck dumb by what was occurring in his presence, imagine that.

How would you respond though – have you ever thought of what your response or reaction would be as you stand in the presence of God in the form of Jesus?

I am reminded of the popular song written by Bart Millard of Mercy Me “I can only Imagine”
Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel?

Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still?

Will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall?

Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all?

I can only Imagine.

So, Peter’s reaction really isn’t that unusual after all, he was in awe he was in the midst of a powerful conversion moment.

This moment was actually the second declaration from Heaven that Jesus is the Son of God, according to the Gospel of Mark. The first was at Jesus’ baptism, in Mark 1:11 “And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased”.

You are my Son, whom I love – This is my Son, whom I love

We should be listening – this man is the Son of God, and God loves his Son. This is also the point where Jesus is fully aware that he must experience suffering and death to be resurrected. This confirmation by God – My Son, Whom I love – is assurance that God would be with Jesus through this time.

When we read verse eight we see that just as suddenly as the cloud appears it dissipates and when the disciples look around there was no one except Jesus – standing there in all his glory. Another powerful moment for the disciples.

This kind of reminds me what the future will be like when Jesus returns – when the cloud of this earthly kingdom disappears and only Jesus will remain.

And yet another powerful moment!

It's too bad that the disciples, Jesus buds, his inner circle, Peter, John and James didn't fully realize the implications of that cloud, that revelation, and that transfiguration. They missed out on something truly powerful in their lives. How often does that happen to us, we miss something that is powerful and potentially life changing because we couldn't understand? Maybe it is the fact that they didn't fully understand what was happening that led Jesus to order them in verse nine, to remain silent on the matter until he had risen from the dead. This 'Messianic Secret', is not an attempt by Jesus to conceal or deny his identity, but rather an attempt to correct and complete any incomplete or inadequate understanding of who he was, his identity, his divine nature.

How could the disciples talk about something they could not fully understand? We read in verse ten that the three disciples although they kept the matter to themselves discussed what 'rising from the dead'. I am sure they were thinking in some abstract figurative term, such as waking up or seeing something previously unseen, but isn't that what they had just experienced. Isn't having the divine nature of Jesus revealed to them through the voice of GOD like a 'rising from the dead' experience in the figurative sense? They truly did not understand the implications of what they had just witnessed.

How could they fully understand the transfiguration until they witnessed Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, until the whole story had unfolded before them.

How could we understand without knowing the rest of the story? There are times when, like those three disciples, when we are frightened by transcendence and confused about the call to suffer, die, and rise in following Jesus – what does that mean?

We can certainly identify with those three disciples, sometimes we have experiences that shake and transform us. Experiences that give us a glimpse of how powerful God is. -- I have. These experiences grip our hearts but somehow, like Peter, we don't recognize their significance. We might feel like we have been spared for a purpose but don't quite know what that purpose is.

I have had one particularly profound experience in my life that literally brought me to my knees and infused me with the realization that God was present in my life and whatever else I thought about myself, God was going to be with me and give me the strength to pull myself up out of the trashcan that was my life. I have been moving forward, closer to him, every day since that night.

In moments when I have walked with someone during pastoral care visits I have had people recount similar experiences, some were changed and had a strong sense of what the purpose was, others unfortunately were left wondering "Why", why did this happen? Sometimes, however, when we have that sense of divine we want to prolong the experience or commemorate it somehow. Maybe that was Peter's plan when he offered to 'build booths'.

This was a definite conversion moment for Peter, John, and James, a moment as Paul writes to the church in Corinth when we are transformed or transfigured “and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (II Corinthians 3:18).

What do we do with our conversion moments, the moments when God tries to contact us, reaches out to us to wake us up, the ‘rising from the dead’ moments?

God expects us to be transformed in our relationship with him, if when finally receiving the gift of salvation we are not transformed into what is good, what is acceptable and perfect, then we have not fully accepted Jesus into our lives.

Those moments when you wonder why something happened, or why was I spared, those are the moments when God is trying to reach you. Listen to the message that God is giving you in these moments. It is unfortunate that God must reach down and shake us, we would love to have the experience of Moses and encounter God in an obvious fashion within a burning bush – who would not pay attention to that encounter. Even the experience of Elijah, hidden within the crevice to hear the “still, small voice of God” within the whisper of the wind – who would not pay attention to that. But in the busy, noisiness of our lives sometimes God has to shout at us, shout at us and shake us up to get our attention – and even then, we don’t listen, we are too busy rationalizing or in too big of a hurry to get through this life to change course and pay attention to the directions we are getting from God. Why then do we sit back and lament that God is not with us, God has turned his back on us, God is not paying attention to us. God has **never** left us, God **has not turned away from us**, God **is paying attention** to us – it is us who have turned away – we have pushed God to the periphery of our society, we have taken his name out of our speeches, we have ceased to pray and call on God, we have stopped seeking God’s face, we have turned our backs on God in our everyday lives, we have quit paying attention to God. We NEED to be silent and listen!

If you stay silent and listen, you might just be transformed from a dirty rag into the finest of paper...