

News Too Good To Tell

Luke 9:28-36

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Did you hear the story about an inattentive, workaholic husband who suddenly decided to surprise his wife with a night to remember? He went down to the department store and bought her the expensive dress she had been admiring. He bought her a large bottle of perfume to go with it. He ordered tickets to the Broadway play she had been wanting to see and made reservations at their favorite restaurant. On his way home he stopped by the florist and bought two dozen red roses which he carried home under his arm. Upon arriving home, he exploded through the door, hugged his wife affectionately and told her what he had done. "I just want you to know that I love you; I appreciate you; I adore you."

Instead of melting in the man's arms his wife started screaming at the top of her voice. "This has been the worst day of my life," she said. "It was awful at the office. We lost our biggest account; co-workers were obnoxious; clients were unreasonable. I came home to find the kids had broken my favorite lamp; the baby sitter is quitting; and the water heater is out; and now surprise of surprises, my normally sober husband comes home drunk."

Perhaps all of us are a little circumspect about surprises. If things seem too good to be true, they usually are. We even feel that way about our religion. Methodists, particularly, like things done with decency and order. So when the Bible starts talking about a transfiguration with radiant faces and glowing garments and visitors from the dead, we become more than a little suspicious. What is going on here? Would somebody explain it to us so that we can get it into our scientific minds? All along the question remains: Are we willing to let ourselves be engulfed in mystery, inspired by glory, transformed by encounters of a divine kind? That's what the transfiguration of Jesus is all about. Come with me today and let us take a little closer look.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD IS A CALL TO PRAYER.

Verse 28 says, "*And he took Peter, James and John with him and went up on the mountain to pray.*"

The Psalmist said, "*I lift up my eyes to the hills, From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth*" (Psalm 121).

At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Law and his face shined brightly, so bright that people were afraid. At Mt. Carmel, Elijah exposed the priests of Baal when God consumed a soaking wet sacrifice and thousands of people came to believe. From Sabbath School Jesus knew that when you want to meet God face-to-face, to feel His power and know His grace, you go up the mountain to pray. And He went up

a mountain to pray.

Jesus is facing a critical decision. If you make this Son of God truly human, he is trying to decide about turning toward Jerusalem. Would He turn His face toward Jerusalem and follow the way of the cross or would He do otherwise? It was one of the most important choices in His life and He needed a little help. He needed a lifeline at this moment for the right answer to His Lord. At Jerusalem there will be humiliation and heartache. At Jerusalem there is a cross and a brutal crucifixion. It takes no revelation to know that. It will take some divine power to endure that. So he takes His closest friends, Peter, James and John and goes up a mountain to pray.

In the critical moments of our lives we can pray. We are spiritual beings capable of communion with God. In times of great need, prayer is not a last resort, but a first priority. We cannot 'at least' pray, we can first and foremost pray. It is a gift to us, the gift of prayer.

Someone said, "To pray is to stroke the face of God." To pray is to bring our burdens to the Lord and leave them there. To pray is to change. Prayer changes us. To pray is to tap the power of God for the needs of the day. To pray is to enter a love relationship with the Divine. To enter into the most intimate moments of our lives, that is our privilege as people of faith.

Richard Foster in his book on prayer says, "An invitation to prayer is an invitation home. For too long we have been in the far country, a country of noise, hurry and crowds; a country of climb, push, and shove; a country of frustration, fear, and intimidation. God welcomes us home to serenity, peace, and joy; home to friendship, fellowship and openness; home to intimacy, acceptance, and affirmation."

Foster continues: "We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of His heart where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of His friendship where we chatter and mix batter in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of His strength where we can feast to our hearts delight. He invites us into the study of His wisdom where we can learn, grow, stretch, and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of His creativity where we can be co-laborers with Him, working together to determine the outcome of events. He invites us into the bedroom of His rest where new peace is found and we can be vulnerable and free." We are invited to pray.

One person in time of great need offered this prayer. "God grant me to be silent before you that I may hear you, at rest in you that you may work in me, open to you that you may enter, empty before you that you may fill me. Let me be still and know that you are my God."

The transfiguration is a call to prayer. We need to be a praying people.

THE TRANSFIGURATION IS AN EXPERIENCE OF WONDER. In Verse 29 we read, *“And as He was praying the appearance of His face changed, His clothes became bright as a flash of lightning.”* Heaven came down and glory filled His soul.

This encounter of a divine kind did two things for Jesus. It gave Him an affirmation of who He was and it gave Him the assurance He needed for the mission that was before Him. When Jesus was born the angels proclaimed His birth. The Divine had come among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son. When He was baptized, the heavens opened and the dove descended. Now a voice from heaven says in Verse 35 *“This is my Son whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*

If you are setting out on a difficult mission you need to know who you are and whose you are and at this moment in Jesus’ life, He has the reaffirmation of His true identity. At this moment of His life, He has the assurance of His mission. In Verse 30 it says, *“Two men, Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”* The Law and the prophets are behind you on this. Sometimes we need that kind of help; do we not? In challenging moments of life we need to know who we are and why we are here.

The year was 1986. I was on a spiritual retreat called the Walk to Emmaus. It was Saturday night and I was sitting alone in a Catholic chapel. The past eighteen months had been particularly difficult in my ministry. I had accepted an appointment where people were grieving the departure of their beloved pastor who had left the denomination and later left the ministry. For eighteen months I could do nothing right. The services were too short; the services were too long. If I wore a gray robe, I should have worn a black robe or no robe at all. Lay leaders were struggling to be in control, but were so controlling that they were not willing to reveal the true facts of the situation.

I landed at this retreat weary in well-doing, wondering about my future in ministry and its impact on my family. In that little chapel, that night the doors of heaven opened for me. The statues came to life. It was the most mystical moment I have ever known. I cannot find words to describe it because you cannot describe a mystery. You can only experience it. I remembered the words of Isaiah when God said to Isaiah *“I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you. I am the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, your Savior.”* Then I heard a voice, the voice of God, *“You have no one to please but me; let my ways be your ways and my thoughts, your thoughts.”* I will never forget it as long as I live. After about two hours of being in that chapel alone, I walked out of there with a new understanding of ministry that has not left me through the years. I learned that night in the privacy of a little Catholic chapel whom I needed to please in ministry and whom I was serving. I went back to that church and we had eight wonderful years of service together. God will not

desert you in your hour of need. He will come to you. He will claim you as His own and make His will known.

In the last sermon he preached on earth, Martin Luther King, Jr. preached at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee. He talked about being on the mountaintop. Listen to what he says, “Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But, it doesn’t matter to me now because I’ve been to the mountaintop and I am happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” In your hour of greatest need, God will come to you.

Flying over large bodies of water, airplane pilots encounter a danger called vertigo. It’s a condition where one becomes confused as to what is up, down, left and right. Safety lies in following instruments instead of inclinations, facts instead of feelings. There comes a time in life when we are going to need some direction beyond ourselves to keep from destroying ourselves. In moments like that we will be wise to seek direction from God. The transfiguration is an experience of wonder.

THE TRANSFIGURATION IS A RESPONSE OF SILENCE. In Verse 36 we read, *“And the disciples kept this to themselves and told no one at that time what they had seen.”*

Peter wants to start a building program, freeze the moment, and make a monument of the place. In Verse 33 it says, *“He did not know what he was saying.”* Once more Peter has foot-in-mouth disease. He forgets it’s better to be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt. Here he is trying to make a suggestion in a moment when it would have been better to have been quiet.

Mystery is a moving target. Each moment belongs to itself. You can’t make a monument out of a mystery. William Blake put it this way, “He who binds to himself a joy does the winged life destroy. He who kisses the joy as it flies, lives in eternity’s sunrise.”

We have made great mistakes in trying to institutionalize an inspiration. People experience a revelation from God and pretty soon we have a whole denomination of people springing into existence. We love the spectacular. We put it on television and make the recipients stars in order to keep followers in a constant state of adrenalin arousal. All the while Jesus is saying, *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

Discipleship is not lived out on the mountaintop, but in the valley. In the scriptures there is an epileptic boy with a half-believing father waiting to be healed in the valley. The road to Jerusalem is a necessary journey. Jesus must go from the Mount of Transfiguration to the Mount of Calvary; salvation calls for a Savior, not a shrine. There are some things that are best to be left in the moment.

What might we do this Lent to cultivate the silence? One thing you can do is to carve out thirty minutes or so of your day so that you can sit and reflect on these scripture guides. We have books to help you listen to His voice and let Him speak.

Eric Reed says, “We turned off the T.V. for Lent. I loved television. My wife had long surrendered the remote to me. Everybody knows I love *Raymond* and I was going to miss *March Madness*. Nevertheless, we closed the doors on the television and entered Lent in silence. Our den was stilled before our souls were stilled. In this stillness we went to sleep a little earlier, we read more carefully, we talked more deeply. By Holy Week we were ready for Christ to break our silence however he might choose.”

I don't know where the Lord might lead you, but I know we need to give Him some space where He has a chance to speak. Honor the silence for in it you will find the Lord. When the stunning reality of the crucifixion hits home, silence may be our only response.

*There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God,
A place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.*

Trust your mystic moments. Let them be, for they will bring you to the heart of God.

Amen.

