

Mark 9:2-13

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

Title: Don't Get Ahead of Jesus

This is the second time in as many weeks that we have seen Peter getting in front of Jesus when he should be staying behind him – the proper posture for a disciple is following Jesus, not telling Jesus what to do or not do. Last week, he had the audacity to confront Jesus about all his “go to Jerusalem to die on a cross” talk. Jesus stopped him in his tracks with, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” This week, Peter starts making grand plans about building tabernacles, and this time God the Father has to interrupt him with, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Peter wants his protégé Mark to be sure to let everyone know: I’m was so clueless that God Himself had to cut me off!

But again, we can relate to Peter, can't we? When God answers a prayer, or some new experience or possibility opens up, we start jumping to conclusions.

Examples:

- I really enjoy doing this. God must want me to make it my career!
- That was a really fun date! God must want me to marry them!
- We really enjoyed our vacation at that place. God must want us to move there!
- We have a great relationship with that other church. God must want us to merge!

It's only natural that when something good is happening, we want to give it the best possible meaning and make it last as long as possible. A prime example of this is attending a great church conference or spending a week at Christian camp.

But inevitably, that desire runs counter to what God is actually doing, and prevents us from understanding why God is actually doing it.

God uses camps and conferences to encourage us, to inspire us, to fill us with hope and enthusiasm for life and for mission. God draws us up to the mountain top so we can take in the view, to see that bigger picture and the greater reality. God wants us to take that experience back... back to down the hill, back to our everyday grind, back to gritty and difficult circumstances that people experience down in the valley.

Peter thought God's will was to build monuments, establish an institution, and someone capture this moment and this revelation for all time. But we serve a God who doesn't stand still... God is always on the move! We serve a God who want things to stay the same... God is always doing something new! The Transfiguration is less about what Peter, James and John got to see, but about the change in their seeing!

Core

God's revelation isn't about what we see, but *how* we see.

When God grants us a revelation, what we are receiving is a glimpse into the Way Things Truly Are. God gives us mountain top experiences to prepare us for when Jesus leads us into the world with new perspective.

Illustration: **Thomas Merton's Epiphany at Fourth and Walnut**
(include image of Thomas Merton here)

The famous Trappist monk Thomas Merton tells a remarkable story that, for us, might be a modern-day transfiguration experience, and a sure indication that God still graces human beings with glimpses into the Way Things Truly Are. He speaks of an experience he had on March 18, 1958. He was standing on the corner Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky. Merton was doing errands, wearing the plain black clothing of a priest... the Trappist robes were only for when he was at the monastery. It was an ordinary day, and Merton was standing on the street corner surrounded by ordinary people going about their ordinary business. As he looked at them, they suddenly changed – or rather, *how he was able to see them* suddenly changed. He wrote,

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream....

“This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.... It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake....

“There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.... There are no strangers! ... If only we could see each other [as we really are] all the time.

There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other....”

There are at least two really important things we can take from this:

What we see is temporary; How we see is forever.

First, Merton’s glimpse into the Way Things Really Are was temporary, what the way he looked at the world was changed forever.

God is still in the revelation business

Second, God’s is still in the revelation business. While we may not have an experience as dramatic as what Peter or Thomas Merton had on this side of heaven, God is still revealing. When it happens...

- Say thank you
- Share the experience with others
- Ask the Lord – Don’t tell him – how you should respond.

Call

Look for a new revelation of God this week.

Amen!

