

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 9:2-9

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

Over the course of my father's life, he worked in several professions—the last being photography. As he was learning the art of photography, his family often was his practice subjects—something, I confess, that I did not always enjoy. I don't like posing for pictures. But I have some professional photos of our boys that I now very much appreciate.

One in particular is a portrait of our boys lying on their stomachs with their cousin Rachel seated between them holding a red rose. It is a perfect portrait capturing their images at a happy time in all of our lives. Their futures looked bright. Our boys were enjoying the simplicity of childhood even as they were learning needed skills in elementary school.

And Rachel was also enjoying all the things little girls enjoyed doing as she awaited the joy have having a sibling, a little sister.

What we did not know at that moment in time, was that a dark and sad time was yet to come. Rachel's mother became ill with breast cancer. She had a mastectomy and went through chemo treatments; but, in spite of the treatments, in less than a year, she died, leaving behind my brother and their two lovely daughters. All that we have left are the happy memories we revisit when we see photos like this special one.

Peter, James, and John found themselves in the midst of an incredible moment when they went to a mountaintop with Jesus. It's on mountaintops where the bible records many great things have happened. On this mountaintop, the disciples witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus. Mark tells us that Jesus' garments became radiant. The word he actually used to describe this radiance was "stilbein"—used to describe the glistening gleam of shimmering brass or gold or of polished steel or of the golden glare of the sunlight. What a sight that alone must have been!

Then a cloud overshadowed the scene. God was in the cloud and from the cloud, God spoke. The fact that God spoke from a cloud is reminiscent of Jesus' baptism—something we can connect because we have the scripture to tell us about it; but these three disciples were not a party to that special moment.

This was an awesome, unimaginable—even terrifying moment—likely leaving them speechless. The scripture tells us that Peter did not know what to say because he was terrified. Stumbling for something appropriate to say or do, Peter suggested that they build three dwellings—one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. It was almost as if he wanted to do something to commemorate the moment, like taking a picture so that they would never forget the moment.

For the disciples this was a moment to celebrate. Their teacher, Messiah and friend was surrounded by the best of the best: Moses, the supreme law-giver of Israel, Elijah, the first and greatest of the prophets, and God. If they ever had any doubts about whether following Jesus was a legitimate exercise and use of their lives, and that Jesus was indeed God's Son, the Messiah, witnessing this holy moment erased all their doubts.

For Jesus, on the other hand, this was a time of confirmation that he was indeed fulfilling God's plan. When these two great figures met with Jesus it meant that the greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets said to Jesus, "Go on!" It meant that they saw in Jesus the completion of the ultimate goal, the fulfillment of all that they had dreamed of in the past. It meant that they saw in Jesus all that history had longed for and hoped for and looked forward to. And it was as if at that moment Jesus was assured that he was on the right path because all history had been leading up to the Cross. He was heading to Jerusalem where he would be rejected, persecuted, and die, to save humanity from itself.

Peter, James, and John would not have wanted this holy moment to be about this. They just did not understand even though Jesus tried to warn them that he must suffer and die. In fact, something like six days prior to this mountaintop experience, Jesus predicted his death and resurrection for the first time to them.

That time, Peter took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking so foolishly. Jesus, then, reprimanded Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" Mark tells us that Jesus predicted his death a second time, and even a third time; but the disciples still did not understand. So how could we expect them to see in this picture-perfect moment, anything other than the good things they wanted to see.

Into this photo-op came then, the cloud from which the voice of God spoke so that the disciples could hear. You might remember that when God spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism, he said, "This is my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." The voice from heaven gave approval of his Son who was beginning his ministry.

This time, however, the voice of God, spoke to the disciples, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Did you catch what God said? "Listen to him!" God said. The voice identifies Jesus directly to the disciples and commands that the disciples listen to him.

The importance of listening becomes clear by comparing it with the scene that came before it, in which everything was visual. The disciples see the transfiguration of Jesus, the whiteness of his clothing, the appearance of Elijah and Moses alongside Jesus, the cloud that overshadows them. After the voice speaks, they look around and see only Jesus. Nothing is wrong with what the disciples have witnessed, except that they have not yet listened and heard what Jesus has said to them, so they are not yet ready to understand what they have seen.

In other words, the heavenly voice calls the disciples to listen to Jesus as well as watch his deeds. It was a wonderful experience to witness over the years, the miracles and healing Jesus performed. It was inspiring to watch Jesus deal with people compassionately, even those considered the scum of the earth. It must have been a delight to watch Jesus with his wisdom and words put the selfish and controlling religious leaders in their place. And here, to witness the amazing transfiguration, what else can be said but, "Wow!"

We can read the stories of Jesus and be amazed over who he was and what he did. We can look back over our lives and recall moments when we have felt and seen Jesus at work in our own lives. We feel so close to him in those moments, and we wish that feeling would stay with us forever. It's like when our youth go to National Youth conference, to that mountaintop experience, both figuratively and literally speaking, and have an encounter with Jesus through

uplifting worship, rich fellowship with Christians from all over the country, and intimate moments of sharing with one another about what they are learning, feeling closer to Jesus than they ever did before. It's a feeling they don't want to lose.

Many of us have had these kinds of moments. They become like photos we hang on the wall, commemorating an unforgettable time, but now they are over, and perhaps the feeling they once held in us is gone. But are they over? Are they gone? Not if we are listening to Jesus. What we have witnessed through personal life experiences and in the Word of God can continue to inspire us and motivate us in our Christian living if we will just listen to Jesus who speaks to us.

When we witness Jesus in our lives and listen to Jesus through biblical words and life experiences, we hold evidence of our living Christ who came to save—precious evidence that we should share at appropriate times. Jesus told his disciples as they were coming down the mountain that they should not tell anyone about what they had just seen until after his resurrection.

That tells us that there are appropriate times to share our witness of Jesus. We need to discern when those times are. We know that it is the appropriate time to share when we feel the Holy Spirit nudging us to do so. It's important for us to be able to recognize that when we share our witness, we are doing so for the benefit of others and not for ourselves—you understand what I'm saying here—right? We don't want to puff-ourselves-up like the Pharisees would do in the marketplace. Our witness is not for our benefit but for God's work of leading others to Him.

We go through life too often taking photos. I'm speaking figuratively, of course—or maybe not in some cases—of our special moments, our holy encounters with Jesus. We save them, but if all we do is look at them over and over but don't really see; and if in them there is a message, but we don't really listen to the message, what good then is the photo, what good is it to hang that photo on the wall, if we have forgotten what made those moments with Jesus so sacred?

God's advice is to listen. Listen to the message Jesus conveys and be inspired to dig deeper into the things that will grow your own faith. Listen to Jesus and be motivated to share what you've personally come to know and understand about this sacred and divine man known as Jesus, your Savior. Let your photo-ops with Jesus speak to others, so they can listen too. Amen.