

Mark 9:2-9

²Six 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, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then 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." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved listen to him!" ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As 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.

Mark 9:2-9, 2015

Often times, in fact most times, it is helpful to place a bible passage in its context to understand it more clearly;

to look at what stories come before and after, the historical setting and where does it fit into the structure of the book you are reading.

This may be true of much of the material you read.

Today's passage from the gospel of Mark about Jesus' Transfiguration is one that I believe we may be best served by letting it stand on it's own, at least for today,

other than to say that this story sits at the peak of Marks presentation of Jesus life and ministry.

It is the peak because from the time of Jesus' baptism up to this point his fame and popularity have been on the increase,

His proclamation of the good news has expanded throughout the whole territory of Galilee.

From this point on everything leads to Jerusalem and His crucifixion.

The conflict intensifies, His enemies scheme against Him and He will finally die.

So, here is Jesus at the top of His game. It is all down hill from here in terms of how humankind would measure His success anyway.

This is a story unlike any other you can find. It is that mountain top story when a few friends get together and God shows up to be with them and amazing things happen.

They aren't the kind of amazing things that happen when Jesus heals someone or casts out a demon as we have heard about over the last several weeks.

It is amazing in another way.

In a way that lets you know that you are witnessing the sheer presence of God,

And there is nothing you need to do but be there.

But, what meaning can that have for us?

I think we have to ask the question why did Jesus take Peter James and John up the mountain with Him? He could have gone by himself. In fact the three disciples were no more than spectators to Jesus' Transfiguration.

So why?

David Lose is a commentator I read almost weekly.

This week he shares that this gospel passage reminded him of a scene in the TV show "The Walking Dead" when in a conversation between Rick Grimes and Herschel Greene, Herschel affirms that he still believes there is a plan to all this chaos going on in the dangerous zombie infested world they live in that God has something in mind for this post apocalyptic world.

Rick is at best unconvinced.

Lose is amazed, as I am also, at the human capacity to draw meaning from almost any and all circumstances.

Especially in the worst of circumstances meaning provides stability and order to life which would otherwise be utter chaos and meaningless.

And so, when someone you love passes unexpectedly, or maybe even expectedly, you may give up understanding to God's grand plan and whatever meaning that may have for you.

When you lose your job or business you may understand it as God opening a door for you to pursue whatever else He may want you to be doing that is better for you or your family.

Kids will search for meaning to deal with the chaos of having to move and begin making new friends and adjusting to another school.

Often times that meaning will be centered around the greater plan for the family as described by mom and dad.

The randomness of life is difficult for you to deal with and so your desire and ability to find meaning can be quite helpful in these times of tragedy and transition.

You find something that can move you forward in life. When you find meaning in the events of life you can be open to and welcome the possibilities of new experiences.

So what does this have to do with Jesus' Transfiguration?

From where we sit, and I invite you to pretend for a moment you are Peter, James or John up on that mountain top, it is difficult to find meaning in this event.

This scene defies interpretation and discernible purpose, and yet rocks the world of those who witness it.

Imagine what Peter, James and John went through up on that mountain.

Jesus takes these three with him and is transfigured before their very eyes.

Mark describes the event as Jesus' clothes becoming dazzling white such as no one on earth could bleach them.

Then there is the appearance of Elijah and Moses, ancient prophets that these disciples had only read about in Israelite history.

Then there is the voice:

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Peter, James and John were terrified to the point of being speechless.

But, as he always does, Peter comes through.

Isn't interesting that Peter's response is to suggest that the disciples build a booth for each one, Jesus, Elijah and Moses to stay in?

Now, at this point, Peter is reflecting back on Israel's festival of booths which is the final and greatest of the feasts each year, and becomes the worship for all the nations when the entire world finally turns to God in the Book of Zechariah.

Peter tries to re-interpret this event, reframe it in a picture he is already familiar with to give it clear meaning.

This helps him make sense of something he clearly does not understand;

And perhaps was not supposed to understand.

But what has he really done?

Peter has come perilously close to missing an encounter with God.

The voice of God says,

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.”

while Peter wants to fit what is happening into a plan.

But, God invites him instead to be still, to shut up, and experience the wonder and mystery of Jesus.

In our culture today most people claim to be spiritual,

and to one degree or another, you all desire an encounter with God,
and have some sense that there is something greater than
yourselves;

something more than you can see or touch.

And yet, in those moments that God draws near you find yourself afraid,
uncertain, and feeling out of control and so try to domesticate your
experience of the Holy by fitting it into a plan,

or a framework you are familiar and comfortable with.

And what happens when you do that? You come perilously close to missing
an encounter with God.

This all kind of reminds me of the spiritual retreat I went to a few weeks
ago.

In the exercises we did a part of that was giving yourself up to the
Holy Spirit in those meditations

Now that is a real unpredictable thing, and scary because I
know how God can use those moments to change you.

That is the common fear;

Being changed, transformed.

What you have, who you are may not be everything you want but at least you know it, you are used to it and have created some order in your life around that.

You are able to deal with the ordinary events, encounters of all types, and tragedies of life within the framework or as parts of the plan God has for your life.

But you know, maybe there is no plan that everything fits into and what may seem random really is,
and that is just how God planned it considering the free will we have.

Maybe what we learn from the Transfiguration of Jesus, and the disciples experience there,
is that in our encounter with the Holy we need to take time, to create space to experience the sheer presence of God.

We need to have a place,—and not necessarily a safe place, for how could any experience with God be safe when you are afraid of being changed or transformed?—but a place where you can encounter the wonder and mystery of God and God’s love.

For really, that is all there is; love.

I dare say that as you come here you enter one of those places; a space where everything else is left behind, where you give yourself to God’s Spirit and Love;

a space where I will not build you a booth, or reframe your encounter with God to make it more comfortable or meaningful,

but a space where I will be with you in your witness of the sheer presence of God, in your encounter with the wonder and mystery of God and God’s love through Jesus Christ, and from there alone you will draw your meaning and be transformed.

Amen