

February 14, 2021

Texts: Psalm 50: 1-6; Mark 9: 2-9

Title: “Driven to Their Knees”

Church tradition says that on this Sunday, we remember the Transfiguration of Christ. Everywhere else, at least this year, it’s known as Valentine’s Day. Now love is a central component of our Christian faith...but I’m going to talk about the Transfiguration. We’re going to a mountaintop with three of Jesus’ disciples where they have an absolutely out of this world experience.

Speaking of mountaintop experiences, I heard of a story about a group of mountain climbers set out to conquer a high mountain. One of their number was a beginning climber making his first climb. It was a tough climb but at last they reached the top. Once it was clear that the beginning climber was at the very top, he stood straight up with arms raised and yelled, “I did it!”

At this point, a strong gust of wind nearly blew him off the mountain. The more experienced climbers had a good laugh at this, then explained to him that when you get to the top of a mountain you never stand straight up, but rather you drop to your knees to avoid being blown off the mountaintop.

That’s a good lesson when it comes to mountaintop experiences—first go to your knees. The experience that Jesus’ disciples had on the mountaintop was one that quite literally drove them to their knees.

Now the disciples were both shocked and confused when Jesus said he must suffer and die. This wasn’t what they understood the plan to be when they decided to drop everything to follow Jesus.

But on the mountain, they saw something way beyond Jesus the man...they were introduced in an incredible way to Jesus, the Son of God. Christ's face became as "bright as the sun" according to Matthew 17:2 and "his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them" according to Mark 9:3.

As if this weren't enough, the disciples saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, both of whom had been dead for hundreds of years. Moses, you will recall, gave the people of Israel the Ten Commandments and led them to the Promised Land. Elijah was the first prophet of Israel and, at his death, was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. These two men represented the Law and the Prophets, the sources of authority in Jewish life.

Peter, who could always be counted on to say something whether appropriate or not, said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Mark speculates that Peter did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) All three of the Synoptic Gospels record Peter's words—which pretty well authenticates that he said them.

The verses that follow Peter's mindless babbling are insightful.

Mark tells us, "Then a cloud appeared and covered them." The Jewish people associated God with a cloud, remembering how God led the ancient Israelites in a cloud through the desert. On the Mount of Transfiguration the voice of God thundered from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" At this, according to Matthew, the three disciples "fell on their faces, and were filled with

awe.”

Driven to their knees on the mountain . . . If there was any question that there was something different about Jesus, it’s made clear here: Son of man . . . Son of God . . . Savior of the world . . . Immanuel . . . King of Kings . . . Lord of Lords.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three say that God spoke and identified Jesus as His Son and commanded the disciples to “Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:15; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). “Suddenly,” Mark says, “when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.”

It was a striking experience that the disciples would remember all of their lives. Years later Peter wrote in his second epistle, “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory . . . We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Can you imagine the impact that this experience had on Peter, James and John? They were kneeling in the presence of the Son of God.

Jon Tal Murphree in his book, *Made to be Mastered*, tells about the impact that walking on the moon had on two of the astronauts that had that opportunity. For one of them he says, “Moon walking had been his greatest goal in life...but once it was attained there was no higher goal and he became disillusioned. He lost his ambition and his drive. Finally, he suffered an emotional breakdown.”

For another astronaut, however, the moon visit meant something totally different. In his autobiography, *To Rule the Night*, James Irwin wrote, “As we flew into space, we had a new sense of ourselves, of the earth and of the nearness to God. We were outside ordinary reality; I sensed the beginning of some sort of deep change taking place inside of me.”

Irwin continued, “The ultimate effect has been to deepen and strengthen my faith. On the moon the total picture of the power of God and his Son Jesus Christ became abundantly clear to me.”

Who couldn't be affected by walking on the surface of the moon? And who couldn't be affected by being in the presence of the divinity of Christ?

The time came for Jesus and his three disciples to come down off the mountain. As Peter, James, and John came down they no doubt thought about the meaning of what they'd just experienced. My guess is that they walked back down in silence—they were too filled with awe to speak.

Jesus told them that they were to keep silent about what they'd seen until after he was resurrected from the grave. Then, they were to tell everyone.

And that is where we are today. In our time together this morning we've been with Jesus and those three disciples on the mountain top. In our minds and hearts, hopefully we've been driven to our knees! Now that we are leaving this place, it's our turn to witness with our lives as well as our speech that we've been in the presence of the Christ—Son of man . . . Son of God . . . Savior of the world . . . Immanuel . . . God with us . . . King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen.

