

**GLIMPSSES OF GLORY:
MOUNTAIN TOPS AND VALLEYS
MARK 9:2-13
FEBRUARY 10, 2013
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**

(PPT of Raphael's Transfiguration painting)

One minute I was David,
 a twenty-something student working on a master's degree,
 married for two years,
 living in a tiny top floor apartment with no air conditioning.
 Then the bishop laid hands on my head, said a few words,
 and I was The Reverend David Trawick,
 ordained United Methodist pastor,
 authorized to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and order and lead the church.
 No, it was not exactly like Tony Stark putting on his Iron Man outfit,
 Peter Parker transforming into Spiderman,
 Clark Kent becoming Superman,
 or Bruce Wayne turning into Batman.
 In fact, to tell the truth, I was a little disappointed that
 I was still sweating beneath that heavy black clergy robe,
 and that the heavens had not opened up with great rays of light shining on me.
 My ordination at the hands of the bishop did not endue me with any superhuman powers.
 It was the United Methodist's Church's recognition that
 God had called and gifted me to serve in vocational ministry,
 that I had done some required training and development to serve in that way,
 and I had passed evaluations by the District Committee on Ordained Ministry
 and the Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.
 And in case anyone is wondering,
 No, I do not want anyone addressing me as The Reverend David Trawick,
 OR the Reverend Doctor.
 I'm David.
 There was a moment when Jesus was visibly transfigured on a mountain top.
 But it did not change who Jesus was.
 It was a moment of *revelation to others* of who Jesus always was.
 This church season of Epiphany is all about the revealing of Jesus and who he is.
 Today is the last day of this season, Transfiguration Sunday.
 Open your Bibles, and let's read the story together.

MARK 9:2-13

Clearly the focus of this story is to tell us who Jesus is:

The messiah, the Son of God, showing forth the glory of God.

But let's back up and see some of the details in the text.

(v.2) This was "after six days."

Is there a suggestion of the Sabbath?

A day in which we are to stop working and give glory to God?

When you've got a day off of work,

do you really stop working and get any rest?

Or do you stay busy tinkering and cleaning and catch up on stuff?
 The point of the Sabbath is not just a day away from the office or the classroom.
 It is to stop working.
 It is to catch a glimpse of the glory of God.

They went up on the mountain on the sixth day.

A mountain top,
 the place where people thought they were closer to the gods.
 The place where God came to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. (Ex.20)
 The place where Elijah heard God's still small voice. (1Kg.19)
 The place where Jesus gave one of his most famous sermons, on the mount. (Mt.5-7)

And whether it was actually the Sabbath or not,
 Peter, James and John found themselves in the presence of God and his glory.
 Why did Jesus choose these three for his inner, inner circle?

Certainly not because they're spiritual superstars,
 because after being with him for 8 chapters of Mark
 they still don't have a clue who Jesus is.
 In fact, they won't be completely sure even after this experience.

But Jesus chose them anyway.
 The same way he calls you and me.
 Not because of any special skills, super spirituality, or good looks,
 but in spite of ourselves.
 He simply loves us, and invites us to spend time with him.

Did you notice it says Jesus led them there "apart, by themselves"?

Solitude.

Away from distractions, away from ministry responsibilities, no jobs to do, no household chores,
 So they could focus wholly on God.

Do you ever take time away like that?

Most people today have a discomfort with real solitude and quiet.

We tend to keep the noise going.
 I wonder if we might be uncomfortable with what we might hear...
 either out of our own inner life, or from God.

Jesus made sure they were apart, by themselves, so they could hear, so they could see.

(v.3) And on the mountain top Jesus was transfigured.

His appearance was transformed right before their very eyes.

Did you notice the description of his clothes?
 "Dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them."
 Sounds like a detergent commercial.

But it is so much more.

The glory of God shone from him.
 This is more than the carpenter's son,
 more than the wandering rabbi,
 more than a social radical or new age philosopher.
 This man is very presence of God.

(v.4) Then two Old Testament characters showed up: Moses and Elijah.

They represented the law and the prophets.

Interestingly, they also had both met with God on a mountain top.

They were having a conversation with Jesus.

Do you wonder what they were talking about?
 Mark doesn't tell us.

Matthew's Gospel doesn't say.

But Luke fills in that blanks for us,

“They spoke to him about his departure,
which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.” (Lk.9:31)

They were talking about the crucifixion.

He's revealed in all his divine glory, and they're looking toward the cross.

Why not just bask in the glory?

Set up three booths and camp out for a while, as Peter suggested?

Why bring up that ugliness?

Because it is on the cross that his true glory is revealed at its deepest.

His true glory is the breadth and depth of his love,

not withholding love from anyone,

no matter what their sins maybe,

willing to go to any length to save any and every sinner

who would receive the gift of salvation,

willing to pay any price, no matter how high,

for you.

That's his true glory.

(v.6) The disciples were terrified by all this.

They thought they were following a Jewish rabbi who stooped low enough to pick them as his followers.

But Jesus was clearly something more than that.

(v.5) Then Peter piped up,

“Let's build three booths and stay here!”

He wanted to camp out on the mountain top,

bask in the glory, hang onto the experience, soak it all in.

I get it.

I remember times when I was up at our ranch in the hill country, and it was just wonderful.

We had our staff retreat there just last month,

and it was great.

Beautiful weather, people I love being with, good food,

no “work” agenda, quiet time for scripture, prayer, worship, deep sharing,

out in God's creation.

And then... we had to come home.

We got back on a Tuesday afternoon.

I didn't even go home first, but went straight to the office.

And it felt so....

Don't get me wrong.

I love what it do.

But I thought about Peter wanting to build those three booths,

and I get it.

But staying put on the mountain top, basking in the glory, was not in the cards.

There was a visible shine of divine glory,

and Moses and Elijah pointing to Jesus.

But wait! That's not all!

(Sound like an infomercial?)

(v.7) As if all that was not enough,

then a cloud overshadowed them

just like when Moses met God on Mount Sinai,

just like the cloud that would descend on the tabernacle,

telling the Israelites that God was there.

And a voice from heaven, clearly the voice of God the Father,

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

Wow.

As if they were not already overwhelmed!

Have you ever had that feeling, and words were not enough?

If you’ve had the privilege of meeting a U.S. President whom you admire.

The first time you saw the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains in person.

Or you get out of town and look up at the night sky

and see thousands of stars and the cloud of the Milky Way Galaxy.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the almost tangible presence of God?

There was no question about Jesus’ identity now.

And that final instruction,

“Listen to him.”

Moses represents the Law, and Elijah the prophets, and they’re important.

But they ultimately point to Jesus.

So stay focused on him.

Listen to him.

(v.8) And suddenly, when they were looking around,

they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

Moses and Elijah gave their place to Jesus.

There was also no more cloud, no more supernatural glow, no more voice.

Just Jesus, looking like the same rabbi they’d followed for a while.

(v.9) And then they came back down the mountain.

Jesus, why can’t we stay on the mountain?

Not only can we not stay, but don’t tell anybody about what you experienced.

What?

How could they possibly keep it to themselves?

Maybe because they thought, “No one’s gonna believe this.”

Sort of like someone who thinks they were abducted by aliens?

An awesome experience that you don’t talk about.

Or maybe they said,

“Don’t tell?”

Are you kidding?”

And Jesus said,

“No, really, don’t tell a soul.

Not until later.

For now, we’ve got to go down the mountain,

back to where people are sick and sinful and broken and needy,

(v.12) back to where I’ll be crucified.

There’s a painting by Raphael that portrays the transfiguration of Jesus. (on screen)

And down below, at the foot of the mountain, are people in distress.

The mountain top is always like that.

You have to come back down,

down to the nitty-gritty daily grind.

Hunger, sickness, people out of work, broken marriages,

and all the rest.

Sadly, what often happens is that mountain top experience begins to fade.

The excitement is gone, and the experience recedes into the background.

And before long, you're right back to hustling through the busyness of the day,
 rushing to get to work or school,
 worrying about the next big assignment,
 struggling to make the checkbook balance,
 dealing with sick kids,
 and all the rest?

If we think about that mountain top experience at all,
 it's likely to be in a fantasy of escaping this messy world
 and getting back up there with that awesome glow.

Let me suggest a different approach to the mountain top and the valley.

Enjoy the mountain top, savor it, when you've got it.

But don't fantasize about escaping to it.

You didn't create it in the first place,

and you can't recreate it.

Believe me, I've tried.

I found that God is not a genie in a bottle

to be conjured up when we want a recharge.

You cannot recreate the experience,

so stop fantasizing about escaping back to the mountain top.

But remember it.

Remember it well.

One of the best ways to keep it fresh in memory is to tell someone else about it.

I get to tell my stories when I preach and teach.

And I find that telling the stories keeps them alive for me.

Maybe you could make that your assignment this week.

Tell someone else about a mountain top experience you had,

when you caught a glimpse of God's glory.

See if it makes those memories more alive for you.

And when the grind of daily life is getting you down,

remember that glimpse of glory then.

And realize that glorious God is right there with you in that daily grind.

He came down the mountain with you.

And he's with you now.

In fact, he's been in much worse places than where you are.

He's been beaten, spit on, mocked, whipped, nailed to a cross, buried.

And he's been raised from the dead.

He is still glorious.

On the best day you have, you can say,

Our God is an awesome God!

And on the worst day you have, you can still say,

Our God is an awesome God!

Thanks be to God!