

“Eavesdropping On Eternity”

Luke 9:28-36

Have you ever been in a public place and found yourself eavesdropping on a conversation? Perhaps it was at the mall, or in a restaurant, or standing in the hall at school. You didn't mean to be nosy, it's just that you were within ear shot, and you could hear every word.

Peter, John, and James had the most wonderful opportunity imaginable to eavesdrop on the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah--and they blew it. Can you imagine the things those three towering figures had to talk about?

Jesus had gone up on a mountain to pray, to separate himself from his daily routine and the attentions of others. Jesus wasn't a workaholic, and he didn't need to impress anyone with his piety. He simply kept a healthy balance of prayer, work, and relaxation. He knew when he needed a "spiritual refill."

So he went up on a mountain and took with him his inner circle of disciples--Peter, John, and James. Luke records in verses 28-31, "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."(NIV)

Wow! Wouldn't you want to be a "fly on the wall" for that conversation? This is one of those times when I wonder why Luke was so dry and factual. Where are the details? How did Jesus' face change? Who needs television shows like "Extreme Makeover" when Jesus can change his very appearance just by the heartfelt intensity of his prayer?

The reason why we don't have any record of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah is because Jesus' three closest disciples slept through it. Can you believe it? We read that Peter and the others only woke in time to catch a brief, glorious glimpse of Israel's greatest Lawgiver and its greatest Prophet before they faded from the scene. What an awful time to fall asleep.

Luke only shares Peter's reaction who, in his excitement, says, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Good old Peter--always putting mouth and foot in gear at the same time. But what was wrong with Peter's reaction? Wouldn't you want to bask in the glory of these great heroes? Wouldn't you want to stay up on that mountain and never come down? The problem is that, in his excitement, Peter is only getting part of the picture. He is missing the full significance of this moment.

Christian sociologist and author Tony Campolo says, "To be a person of faith means three things: You're rooted in the past, you are transformed in the present . . . and you have a glorious vision of the future." ¹ And that's the significance of this moment, of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.

Faith in God is rooted in the past. Hundreds of years earlier, God had set apart a particular group, the Israelites, to be God's own people, to know God and to follow God's way. Sadly, this proud people became enslaved to the Egyptians and their power-mad Pharaoh.

¹ By Tony Campolo in Ten Great Preachers, edited by Bill Turpie (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 15.

But God raised up Moses, a man from Pharaoh's own household, to lead the Israelites out of slavery. And what was their last act before escaping Egypt? To cover their doorposts with the blood of a perfect lamb, so that the angel of Death might pass them by. Through Moses, God gave the Israelites deliverance. Through Moses, God also gave them the Law. The Law was their life blood, the foundation of their nation.

About 1,000 years after Moses and the Exodus, God sent the prophet Elijah to lead the wayward Israelites back to a covenant relationship with God. He exposed false prophets and confronted self-serving kings. And all the while, Elijah reminded the people of Israel that their God is a jealous God, and that their salvation would only come through Him.

Every Jew knew the importance of Moses and Elijah to their history. They understood that faith is rooted in the past.

Faith is also transformed in the present. It was through Peter's relationship with the living Christ that faith became real. Only eight days earlier, when confronted with the question of who Jesus really is, Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus is the Messiah, the Deliverer, the one who would lead God's people out of oppression again. The one who would restore glory to the nation of Israel. And Peter wanted to be in on that glory. That's why he wanted to stay up on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Carpe Diem--seize the day! Let's just stay here in this glow of glory and forget about the life down below in the valley.

Isn't that a tempting thought? Sometimes, we get settled in a spiritual comfort zone and we don't want to leave it. The sanctuary is so lovely, the worship is so fulfilling. All my Christian friends are here. I get to sing familiar hymns and listen to familiar Bible stories and hang out with people who are just like me. It's all so cozy, it's all so right. Why would I ever want to leave?

This is not to say that we don't need time on the mountain top. Our lives are so stressful that we desperately need this time of fellowship and worship.

We understand Peter's impulse to stay on the mountain. We need this time apart with the Master. But Peter was missing the point.

Faith in God has a vision for the future. Peter didn't yet understand Christ's vision for the future. He didn't understand that just as Moses ushered in a system of sacrifices that would temporarily cover the people's sins, Jesus will now be the perfect Sacrifice that takes away the sins of the whole world.

He didn't understand that Jesus would have to suffer and die. He didn't understand that he, too, would suffer and be persecuted for preaching the truth. He didn't understand that Jesus' kingdom was eternal and for all people. He didn't understand that the Messiah came to seek and to save the lost.

There's not a lot of glory in that job description. Instead, there is a lot of sacrifice and hard work. Who wants that? Not Peter. Not us. Peter wanted Jesus to stay in glory on the mountain, but God was sending all of them back down into the valley, to preach and teach and heal--and die--for the sake of all those hurting people living in a less-than-glorious world.

Peter and James and John were not meant to bask in God's glory. Neither are we. We are meant to be doorkeepers, helping people in to the kingdom of God. We are

meant to leave this place and take God's love, and hope, and justice, and truth to all those who are searching and hurting.

God's plan of salvation is for all people, in all circumstances, at all times. Have you lead anyone to the door recently? Let's leave here with a commitment to go back down into the valley and share with someone the glory of God.