

Waiting for Healing  
Mark 9:2–9  
Sunday, February 14, 2021

Each year, we hear the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the Sunday before Lent begins. And when we hear it, we usually understand it to be saying something like this. Jesus takes three of his disciples to the top of a mountain. While they are there, his appearance changes, and light starts radiating from his face and his clothes. The very glory of God is being revealed to his disciples. They are seeing who Jesus truly is.

And then they see Moses and the prophet Elijah standing there with Jesus, talking with him. These heroes of their faith, who they have only heard stories about, they are now *seeing* with their own eyes. This is the greatest moment of their lives and, understandably, they don't want it to end. They want to hold on to it forever. So Peter says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let's build three dwellings – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." They just want to stay there, in that moment, forever.

But then the voice of God booms from the heavens, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!" And then just like that, Moses and Elijah are gone, and it's just Jesus with them on the mountain. Then they go back down the mountain – they can't stay there – because there are people down below in need of healing.

They have this amazing mountaintop experience of the glory of God, and they want it to last forever. And we usually talk about how *we* have experiences, moments, feelings in our lives that *we* want to last forever, but they can't, because God is calling us to keep moving, to follow Christ back down the mountain to do the work of ministry, because there are people in need of healing. This is usually a pretty easy story to preach, because it does all the creative work *for us!*

But this year has been different. I've had a lot harder time figuring out how to approach this story. It feels like, in light of what we have been going through for the past year, we have to read this story differently. Because the past year hasn't exactly been one of mountaintop experiences. It hasn't all been *bad* by any means. But between the pandemic and political division, we haven't exactly been beholding the glory of God like the disciples did. There may have been *glimpses* here and there, but Peter wanted to shelter in place and stay there forever, while – let's be honest – after a year of staying put, *we can't wait* to leave our dwellings, go back down that mountain, and be with the people again. In fact, it doesn't even feel like we're on a *mountain*. In a lot of ways, it feels like we've been at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and now we're hiking back up. And it is long, hard, slow work.

So what does this story of Jesus' transfiguration have to say to us today? Where is God's Word to us in this?

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I think we can start by thinking in terms of perspective. Normally, when we hear this story, we hear it from the perspective of the three disciples who are witnessing Jesus' transfiguration. We identify with *them*. They are having this amazing, mountaintop experience that they do not want to end, and yet they are called to listen to Christ and go back down the mountain. I mean, who else are we going to identify with here? Probably not Jesus who is radiating light and talking with Moses and Elijah. I would dare say that most of us have never had *that* experience. So we put ourselves in the place of the disciples and read it from their perspective.

But there *is* another perspective from which we can hear this story. As Jesus comes back down the mountain with Peter, James, and John, it says that there is a great crowd of people there

waiting for him. People who are sick and hurting and possessed with unclean spirits. They've been there the whole time. While Peter, James, and John were having this amazing experience with Jesus on the mountaintop, they've been there waiting. Wondering. Hoping. "When is he going to come back down? What's taking so long? I wonder if he can heal *me*?"

Like that crowd, we are in need of healing. Physical healing from this virus and the other ailments that plague us. Mental and emotional healing from the effects of a year of physical distancing and isolation that have taken a toll on us. Spiritual healing after being physically separated from the worship and fellowship of our church family. Social healing after a tumultuous year of protests and riots, political and racial polarization and division; disagreements and disappointment with family members and friends. We need healing in places that we can't even identify; we just know that something is *off*. Like that crowd, we are waiting for our savior to come with healing in his hands. And we are wondering, "What is taking so long?"

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This story of Jesus' transfiguration is meant to be reflective of *another* mountaintop story – the story of Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, receiving the commandments from God. Moses was on the mountaintop for 40 days and 40 night, and it says that when the people saw that Moses was gone for so long, they made their *own* god – a golden calf – and they worshipped that. They turned away from the Lord and sought a god that was more convenient and instantly gratifying but ultimately false. Empty. Devoid of power.

And this is the choice that *we* have, too. We, who have been waiting so long for the presence and power and healing of the Lord can choose to continue waiting in expectant hope, or we can turn to our own way and gods that, while maybe they are more instantly gratifying, are still

ultimately false. And while we're not crafting golden calves to worship, there are plenty of false idols that we elevate to the status of gods today. Things that we believe will solve our problems and provide us with the healing that we need. Money and material possessions. Power, like we've been talking about the past few weeks. Drugs, alcohol, and other substances that we think will help us escape the pain and problems of life, but which only bring more pain and problems of their own. Even political leaders or ideologies that we look to as saviors who can deliver us from the evils of the other. There are countless others, but these idols are empty. They are devoid of any real power. They cannot bring healing to our deepest wounds and the deepest longings of our souls.

The alternative is to keep waiting with patient, faithful, expectant hope, because as the prophet Isaiah says, "The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary. God's understanding is unsearchable. God gives *power* to the faint and *strengthens* the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted" – *as we have* – "but those who *wait for the Lord* shall renew their strength." And as Paul said to the Romans, "I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us...We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now, and not only creation, but *we ourselves* groan inwardly while we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is *seen* is not hope, for who hopes for what is *seen*? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we wait for it with patience."

Waiting for the Lord, *hoping* in the God that we cannot see, is hard. But that is the only place, the only *one in whom* we will find the healing and life that we need. And what the story of Jesus shows us is that you have to go through death to get to resurrection. Whether that is a *physical*

death or a dying to self and to sin, a life of faith in Jesus Christ involves the experience of *loss*. But what we are promised is that the *gain* from that loss is so much more beautiful and wonderful and valuable. If we can just endure the wait.

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How do we do that? How do we wait patiently for the healing that we so desperately need and resist the urge to turn to our own way and seek after other gods? I think here we turn our attention back to the mountaintop. Peter tells Jesus that he wants to build dwellings for him and Moses and Elijah and stay there forever. It says that he *said* this because they were *terrified*, and he didn't know *what* to say. So he just throws a plan out there. "Let's do *this!*" That might be what *he* wants to do, but it is not *God's will* for them.

And so right after he says that, a cloud overshadows them, and from the cloud there comes a voice that says, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him." Don't listen to your *own* will. Don't just follow your own desires or the desires of others. And don't listen to the voice of fear speaking from within you (or speaking to you from *others*). *Listen to him*. What the Transfiguration showed the disciples – and what it shows *us* – is that Jesus Christ is the living embodiment of the power and glory of God. And because of that, the disciples were called – as are *we* – to *listen* to him, because he is the Word of God in flesh, and all the authority of God resides in him. If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus. If we want to know what God's will for us is, we listen to Jesus.

In the midst of our fear and confusion, we are called to look to Jesus Christ and listen to him in order to discern what is good and right and true. And the way we do that – the way we hear Christ's voice today – is through scripture and prayer. We read the words of Christ in scripture, we read of the *life* of Christ in scripture, and then we come to Christ in prayer asking, "What are

you saying to me in this, Lord? What are you calling me to do?" And then we *listen*. We *confirm* that sense of calling with the community of faith around us. We say, "This is what I think God is saying to me, what God is calling me to do," and it is the church around us, our companions in Christ that affirm God's voice in our lives and say, "Yes, that sounds good and faithful and true to me," or, "I don't know, maybe we should listen again."

But the point is that we are called to listen to the voice of Jesus Christ through scripture, through the Holy Spirit in prayer, and through the voices of the fellow believers around us. In this time when we don't always know who to listen to, who to trust, and what to believe, we are reminded here that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority for our lives. When we don't know what to do, he is the way. When we don't know what to believe, he is the truth. And when we don't know how we are ever going to make it through this, he is the life. While we wait for the healing that we need, in the midst of all the uncertainty around us, we are called to listen to him. It is Christ, and Christ alone, who can bring peace to our troubled hearts and our troubled minds and our troubled lives and our troubled world. Listen to him.