



Epiphany Series: “God Shows the Way”

“Returning to the Real World:” Sermon Text: Luke 9:28-43

10 February 2013: Transfiguration Sunday

“Even God cannot change the past.”

—Agathon—

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

F.I.T to Serve Family 5K walk

March 2 on a Sunday afternoon we will kick off our OMM 2.0

We will be walking with in our one mile radius

100% of each \$10 registration fee will go to AISD Families in Transition (F.I.T)

Families in Transition serves Arlington families in temporary situations.

You may sign up in church hallway starting today

The first part of our lesson today has been about the glory we see on the mountain. Yet, Jesus and the three disciples depart the mountaintop to return to the real world. When the text reads “on the next day” the phrase joins our two textual portions: We cannot separate God’s glory and the pain of an imperfect world. Listen for the thorough report of the man’s son and his suffering. Note too the blunt statement of the disciples’ failure to help. The disciples’ failure prompts Jesus to ask “how much longer must I be with you” out of frustration. Hear the rest of our lesson for the day:

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.

38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” 41 Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” 42 While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. 43 And all were astounded at the greatness of God (Luke 9:28-43).



We have heard this transfiguration story, as related by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each year on “Transfiguration Sunday.” Even if we have never been to the mountaintop ourselves, we still like to hear about others having the experience. But what happens after the mountaintop experience? We all know that if you go up to the mountain, you must come down. What happens to Peter, James, and John when they descend the mountain?

From a mountaintop moment, disciples go back to the drudgery of the human world of pain, disease, and death. No wonder Peter said it was good that they were on the mountain and should build three dwelling places. When we are in a place of joy, rarely do we want to return to the ordinary world. Yet, Jesus, as the prophets before him, always forces disciples to look at their world—where the rain of God’s grace falls on the just and the unjust (see Mt 5:45). A prophet is a person “who afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted” and Jesus’ lesson concerns prophetic discipleship.

The story of the healing of an epileptic child offers at least three lessons on discipleship. First, disciples alternate their lives in Christ between the mountain of joy and their Christ-needy world. Given people’s nature, however, we tend to overindulge one side of the human-divine equation. Two candles always adorn our church’s altar. These candles represent Jesus’ incarnation. One candle symbolizes Jesus’ divinity, and the other candle signifies Jesus’ humanity. Consequently, we understand Jesus’ essential nature as fully human/fully divine. Jesus represents the fusion of God and humankind.

In the earlier part of the twentieth century, American Christianity wrestled with two primary heresies; heresies as old as the Jesus movement. One side of the dispute included people who retreated from the world’s problems. These persons focused on their own spiritual needs while ignoring the world’s troubles. People often used the transfiguration story of the disciples with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus to support a



theology of retreat. Conversely, others practiced “the Social Gospel.” Although deeply dedicated Christians, their focus was to put the world’s affairs in order. Occasionally they neglected their own spiritual lives. Through the story of the Transfiguration and the healing of the boy with a demon, Luke helps believers understand the vitality of both the personal and the communal characters of discipleship. Could this be why Luke links these two very different stories together?

A second lesson of discipleship in this biblical text teaches us that Jesus’ power over evil is what enables disciples to do what needs to be done if we are to share the realm of God with the people of God. A balance between heaven and earth, or the divine and the human, keeps our lives between the poles of joy and service. If we look too long toward heaven, we miss our calling. If we worry too much about how to live out the nuts and bolts of Christian service, we may forget God’s power that sustains every benevolent effort.

I once heard a story about boxer James Tillis. He was an Oklahoma cowboy who boxed in Chicago in the 1980s. He remarked on his first day in Chicago arriving from Tulsa. “I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down, and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, ‘I’m going to conquer Chicago.’ When I looked down, the suitcases were gone.”

The point is simple. To do God’s work we look up and down, but neither way too long. We look up for God’s direction, and we look down to see our brothers/sisters in need of the resources with which God blesses us.

Luke’s third discipleship lesson reminds us that the chief stumbling block for disciples is the tedium of our hard and often frustrating work. Boredom is a seductive enemy of the Christian life because many of the important things we do are routine. We perform the same activities over and over. Bible study is unlike any other kind of studying. It is too deep and too vital to master. I have never heard anyone say that



she/he knows Scripture well enough. We return to it again and again. The same is true of prayer. Prayer is a relationship with God and we never conclude it. It is always growing and evolving and deepening.

We all know what it is like to give our best effort and hear someone say in appreciation, “Thank you for that wonderful Sunday school lesson. I look forward to next week. I’m sure your next lesson will be just as good.” These compliments have the potential to destroy. Every time we do something well, a similar opportunity rolls around again. We live the Christian life in a habitual, but important, manner again and again. It is easy to simply give up and put our discipleship on “cruise control.” It may be hard for you to believe, but for preachers Sunday comes just about every other day!

Whether one is a Sunday school teacher, a Stephen minister, a teacher or student of Disciple Bible Study, a VBS worker, or whatever—whenever we finish one task, there is another waiting for us. The Christian life can make one both a bored and a boring person, if one is not captured by its beauty and grace. We need the fire of the Spirit to continue to bring energy and creativity to those repetitive but important tasks that Christ has called us to do.

Jesus seems to tell us that looking up is vital to our relationship with God, but that by our looking down, we can do God’s will.

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