

Transfiguration of Our Lord March 3 2019

Luke 9:28-36

Why did Peter, James and John keep silent about what they had seen until later?

Because what they've witnessed because they've stayed vigilant is pretty spectacular, right? The Jesus they knew; challenging, playful, intelligent, strong, gentle, caring, changes as he is praying. He begins to glow, from the description it's like his clothes turn into a white leisure suit with a strobe light attached. Then, if that isn't amazing enough, they see him talking with two of the great forebears of the faith- Moses- embodiment of the Law, and Elijah- embodiment of the Prophets. The two main parts of the Hebrew Bible. It would be a bit like seeing one of the presidential candidates talking to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Given this amazing revelation, why don't they say anything until later?

Maybe it's like when you watch a particularly shocking event or even something as simple as a very well-made movie with a surprise twist. You just can't process it all the right way. Anyone see the Sixth Sense? Did you re-watch it just to catch what you missed? Maybe Peter, James, and John were like that...not sure enough of what they saw to process it. They didn't have enough information.

What more did they need? Perhaps it was the context of what was to come.

Eight days before this mountaintop experience, Jesus was praying and the disciples were nearby (interesting how much Jesus prays in this Gospel, isn't it?) Jesus tells them for the first time that he would suffer at the hands of the authorities, be killed, and rise again in three days. Then he moves into a less than

reassuring description of what it means to be a disciple: denying our self, taking up the cross daily, follow Jesus by losing our life. Quite the effective recruiting speech, isn't it?

Death, persecution, sacrifice is all counter to what they see of Jesus on the mountaintop today. God's chosen, gleaming with the brilliance of angels, surrounded by the embodiment of God's promise to the Jews and to all of creation. This matched the disciples understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah of God. That when the Messiah came all would be made right in the world. The Messiah would conquer and reign in power, glory, and might. This was certainly something to shout Alleluia! about.

Alleluia, that transliteration of the Hebrew meaning "Praise the Lord" or "Praise God". A shout of acclamation, of triumph, of celebration! A shout that comes easiest in the moments of triumph. But one that comes most heartfelt, perhaps, after that time when it seemed we would never shout Alleluia again.

Maybe what Peter, James, and John needed was the journey they would go on when they came down the mountain. When that splendid experience filled with things they had never seen before came to an end. When reality hit...for everyone. They come down the mountain and Jesus sees that the disciples are not ready, and they see a frustrated Jesus. They come down the mountain and the ministry of Jesus just...goes on like it has. We're back to the normal, everyday grind of teaching, walking, preaching, listening, learning, healing.

We love our mountain top experiences, don't we? Whether it is a vacation to an exotic place where we don't have to worry about meals, or school, or work.

Where we can just be with those who we love. Relax. Enjoy beautiful scenery. Spend time together. Indulge in music and theatre. Hike and explore. Get warm.

Or maybe it's one of those moments where you have a spiritual or personal epiphany. An intentional time away, in retreat, where you pray/meditate/learn with others or alone about God or yourself. When you have that visceral moment of understanding, of freedom, of joy! Of seeing what life could be like. A true moment of inspiration.

We need these moments. They give us a glimpse of what lies beyond the mundane. Moments where we can lift our heads above the needs of everyday life and see above the clouds. Those moments when we can shout with all our might, Alleluia! We need these moments to fuel and inspire the rest of our life.

Because, we all must go back down the mountain. Into the everyday- where we can lose sight of or forget what we just experienced. Or, where we are convinced that we cannot bring that mountaintop experience back into this one. That they, in some fundamental way, need to be separate.

I think what Peter, James, and John needed before they could relate their experience of Jesus on the mountain top was to experience all that Jesus predicted was to come. They needed to walk with Jesus through Galilee as the crowds loved him more and the authority's challenges grew. They needed to walk with Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through the challenges in the Temple, the confusing Last Supper (this is my body, this is my blood?), the terror of the Garden of Gethsemane (armed guards! Arrest! Death sentence!), the despair of the crucifixion (Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!). The disbelief and unbridled joy at the resurrection. They

needed that journey to fully appreciate what they had seen. To process that mountain top experience and to fully understand it.

We need this journey to. A journey that Lent provides for us each year. A journey through the difficult road with Jesus, but also a journey where we don't try and gloss over those difficult things with false brightness (like the smile of a pageant participant), but strive to meet them head on. To call a thing what it is, no matter how hard it may be to hear. A time where we are quiet, so we can hear, and speak, and feel. So we can be attentive to our own experience of God in Jesus Christ and perhaps in this traveling with Jesus in an intentional way we, too, might see him differently. That he might be transformed for us in our praying, our time with God in scripture, in our worship.

We need to see that in this less than mountaintop life that we often lead, Jesus is here with us. To be reminded that Jesus always comes down the mountain. But also that, in Jesus, the mountain comes to us. That in the midst of our sorrow, our pain, our doubt, Jesus is with us. We need this time, so that when our Alleluia's come again on Easter morning, they will lift the rafters of this place. So that when we shout "Praise the Lord" on that day those who are asleep might awaken and hear what we have seen. A transfigured Jesus, embodiment of the God who loves all of creation enough to enter fully into it. A Jesus who not even death can keep from us. A Jesus who claims us and calls us to follow.

Like the disciples, we need both the mountain top experiences of God that are today and Easter morning. But we also need the journey down below. We invite you to join us on that journey. One that will bring us closer to the Jesus who

came down, who walks with us, who teaches us the difficult but indispensable things we need to know to be his disciples.

A journey that, to fully enlightens us, needs to be completed. From the joy of the Transfiguration of Jesus to the Ashes on our head on Ash Wednesday (Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return) From the triumphant entry of Palm Sunday (Hosanna in the highest!) to the Last Supper and Jesus death on the cross, to the joy of the resurrection (Alleluia!).

Join us for this roller coaster of a ride that is Lent, stay awake and alert with us, so that we might...perchance come to know and understand better Jesus, transfigured Messiah, crucified Christ, and risen Lord.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!