

This is My Beloved Son. Listen to Him!

Mark 9: 2-9

I have a confession to make. The story of the Transfiguration is one of my least favorite Bible stories. I know it seems unlikely that a preacher would be telling you this because you know we are supposed to treat all the stories in the Bible the same, never showing favorites, showing the same respect to all these wonderful life changing stories. Okay, forget thinking like that. We all, including the preachers, we all have our favorite Bible stories, and yes it is true, we also have our least favorite stories as well. And the story of the Transfiguration is one of my least favorite stories.

Maybe that's because I didn't grow up in a church which necessarily lifted up the Transfiguration as a moment of importance. Or maybe, if I'm telling the truth, this story is one of least favorite bible stories for the simple fact that I don't get it. I don't understand it. One minute, Jesus is a normal guy, taking a hike up a mountain with three of his buddies and then the next moment, boom. The sky is opening, Jesus is shiny and dazzling white, standing there with Moses and Elijah. And then just as quickly, just as strangely, poof, Jesus is a normal guy again, looking around at the others, going, "What? Oh that, that's just the Kingdom of

God coming in full force. Don't worry about that. Y'all aren't ready for. The world's not ready for it. So let's just keep it a secret.”

Yes, I know all the important Bible references embedded in this story, references like this moment on the mountaintop for Jesus is similar to Moses' experience on the mountaintop with God. And yes, I get that Jesus being with Moses and Elijah is significant. This is Mark's way of telling his readers that Jesus is the real deal. I know all of this but I still don't understand the story. This story leaves me wondering. It is confusing. It defies logic. It is full of mystery and to be honest, this story leaves my head hurting. What are we supposed to do as people of faith with the story of the Transfiguration?

Well, I can tell you over the years, there have been many answers to this question but for the most part, we as people of faith have handled the story of the Transfiguration in one of two ways. We have either ignored it, pretending that it is just one more crazy story in the Bible. Then we quickly turned the page, hoping to find a story we liked better, hoping to find something we can understand more clearly. Or we have handled the Transfiguration like Peter... We have turned the moment of the Transfiguration into a photo op with our pal, Jesus.

Here's what I mean by that statement... Like Peter, over the years, we as people of faith have experienced the awesome power of the Kingdom of God in

our lives. We have wondered at its presence in our lives. We have held onto the hope that nothing would ever separate us from that moment, from that experience. And in doing so, we have tried to capture it. We have tried to hold it frozen in time.

To achieve this goal, we have built buildings. We have designed programs, all trying to contain the wonder, the mystery of the Kingdom of God we experienced in that moment. We've told ourselves that nothing would ever compare to that one moment so why bother trying? Unfortunately this way of thinking has led us to ignoring all the other opportunities to meet and experience the Kingdom of God in our lives, opportunities that occur daily if we would only open our hearts and minds to perceive them in our midst.

As people of faith, very much like Peter did in our text today, we, after experiencing the Kingdom of God, have wanted to stay on that mountaintop. We have pretended that everything is good and right while ignoring the very real hurts, the very real brokenness which fills our world.

For so long now, all that mattered to us was that one moment, that one experience we had with the Kingdom of God. And now that we had it, we believed we had everything. We believed we were called to nothing else beyond that one experience with the Kingdom of God, so much so that we as communities of faith have stayed confined to our buildings. We have stayed in our pews. We have kept

our faith the same way, simply because all that mattered was that we...we had already experienced the Kingdom of God, forgetting that was only part of the story of God's grace and love.

However, the sad reality is that while we as communities of faith stayed confined to our buildings, the rest of the world moved on without us. No longer was or is the prophetic voice of faith relevant. No longer was or is the main guiding force in people's lives the wider Church. The world has moved on. Time has moved on. Life has moved on. And we as communities of faith are stuck, dreaming about the glory days and becoming more and more irrelevant with each passing day.

Now before I depress us all and we begin to wonder what's the point of it all, we need to remember there is hope for us as the Body of Christ here on Earth. This hope comes to us in the form of Mark's writing. Remember Mark is concise. He is to the point. So if he is mentioning it, than it is important. We had better pay attention. So it stands to reason that if Mark is mentioning the Transfiguration, than maybe, just maybe we as disciples of Christ should take another look at this story and see what it has to offer.

If we go back to the beginning of this text, we realize that yes Mark includes all those bible references to show us that Jesus is the real deal, that Jesus is the Son

of God. He also add these things for another reason as well. Mark adds them to remind us that God is not finished yet. That this moment is only just the beginning. He wants us to experience the rest of the story.

Mark knows that too many times we as followers of Jesus Christ want to only see the glory of the Kingdom of God and ignore the rest. With this story, he reminds us that without the cross, we can only partially know who Jesus is. To fully understand Jesus, we must continue the journey. We must continue the conversation. We must continue to engage the world in all its beauty and messiness. Then and only then will we really know who Jesus is as the Son of Man. Or as one scholar put it. "Claiming the Messiah is one thing. Listening and obeying to him is something else entirely."

You see, our experiences with the Kingdom of God inspires something in us when we encounter it fully. It inspires a change in us. It inspires a change in the way we speak, in the way we interact with others. Experiencing the Kingdom of God fully inspires a change in the way we live. And let's face it, isn't it just easier to ignore the Kingdom of God in our midst rather than embrace its invitation to change.

That's probably the main reason why we don't like this story. It makes us realize that discipleship is not a one and done moment. Discipleship is not

something which will fit neatly in our calendars or just be something on our to do list, something we can mark off easily or quickly when it is complete. We know that each and every time we come face to face with the Kingdom of God, we are reminded us that discipleship is a way of life. It is a way of being. It is a way of being in relationship with one another. The story of the transfiguration reminds us that discipleship is about changing ourselves so that we can change the world. And that doesn't come easily or without complications.

You see, discipleship is messy. It calls us to leave our places of security and safety. Discipleship calls us to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is among the people of God. In order to do that, we will have to talk to people we are not comfortable talking to or interacting with, seeing them as created in the image of God. We know that to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is among the people of God, we will have to break out of our routine, leave the four walls of the church, or heaven forbid, talk about how God's love has changed our own lives. That is hard. That is scary...yet that is what we are called to do as Jesus' disciples in this world. We are called as followers of Jesus Christ to bring healing and wholeness to all.

No one ever said discipleship was easy. We only have to look at the example Jesus gave us to see that is true. Jesus certainly stirred up the powers that be during his time on earth. Jesus' meddling got him into some sticky situations. But, that's the example he gave us to follow as his disciples. Jesus' ministry here on earth was

to bring the Kingdom of God near for all of God's children. That would have been impossible for him to do if he had simply ignored the moments when the Kingdom of God arrived in full force, moments that had him breaking bread with the lost and forgotten, moments that had him welcoming the little children to come to him, moments that had him calling twelve rag tag imperfect people to be his disciples here on Earth.

You see, Jesus came to show the world that there is another way. Jesus came to bring new life to all of God's creation. Jesus came to transform the world. This all started the moment when the voice of God said, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."...More dangerous words have never been spoken, I think.

Because when we do, when we really listen to Jesus, we realize that everything has changed. We cannot go back to the way we were before we encountered Jesus and his life transforming love. We cannot go back to seeing the world the way we saw it before. Nor do we want to. All our encounters, encounters that intertwine the holy and the ordinary, all our encounters with the Kingdom of God inspire something in us, something from us. They inspire a change in how we act. How we speak, how we interact with others. It changes our consciousness about the things we buy, about how the way we live our life affects people across the globe. Experiencing the Kingdom of God in our lives changes everything,

including changing us. It transforms us. It challenges us to be the person God created us and calls us to be.

Yet, this change, this transformation can only happen if we leave the mountaintop and begin engaging all the hurts and hopes, all the brokenness and beauty this world has to offer. After all, that's what Jesus tells us to do.

So today and all days, may we have the courage to follow where Jesus leads, the strength to listen to what he says and to always open our hearts and minds to the always occurring life transforming possibilities of the Kingdom of God in our midst. Amen.