Mark 9:2-9

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one\* on earth could bleach them.4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.5Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,\* one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved;\* listen to him!’8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

**The Coming of Elijah**

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tellno one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

“We Are Called to Overcome”

Don’t you love the way some of our Bible lessons begin? Today’s reading start with, “Six days later…” Six days later than *what?* The fact that Mark makes a reference to something that occurred six days prior is something that is important to us if we want a full understanding of what’s going on here, and because this transfiguration experience is bazaar in itself, we need all the help we can get in order to know what God would like us to learn this morning.

Six weeks ago, the first Sunday after Epiphany, we read about Jesus’ baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, and Jesus heard the voice of God say to him, “you are my son in whom I am well pleased.” In the past five weeks, we’ve focused upon discipleship, reading about what the disciples witnessed and what Jesus had to say about discipleship. And if you recall, all this time, demons and unclean spirits were forbidden from declaring Jesus, true identity. After all these healings and feeding of thousands of people, Jesus calls his disciples aside and asks who the people say that he is. They say, “John the Baptist,” “one of the prophets,” “Elijah.” Then Jesus asks them, who do you say that I am?” to which Peter responds, “you are the Messiah” which means Christ or Savior. Jesus then goes on to tell them that he must suffer, and die, and in three days he will rise again. Jesus will make the same declaration two more times in Mark, but this first one comes six days before this transfiguration. Why is this important? I believe that it means that we should look at this transfiguration experience as somehow linked to Easter.

Six days ago, Peter had declared Jesus to be the Messiah, but what does that mean to be Messiah? Well the transfiguration experience that was shared by Peter, John, and James gives these men a clearer, but not perfect, understanding of who Jesus is. First, Jesus’ clothes start to glow a bright white, white the color both of purity and of martyrdom (see Revelation 1:14, 6:11). Moses and Elijah appear, representing respectively the Law and the Prophets, and they hold council with Jesus. Peter opens his mouth and a cloud appears (sometimes when we say the wrong thing we imagine that such clouds will appear), and the voice from the cloud says, “This is MY Son, MY beloved; **Listen to him!**” Now is not the time for you to be talking, Peter. Then, suddenly, Moses and Elijah are gone; Jesus alone stands before them. Jesus, who is the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets, now is the only one remaining.

So we see that the Transfiguration tells us in both graphic and symbolic terms, that Jesus is the Son of God, the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets. Now you might think, “If I were Peter, or James, or John, I would have no doubts.” After all, the text says that they were “terrified.” Yet, once all the smoke has cleared, and Jesus taps them on the shoulder and brings them out of shock, he leads them down the back down the mountain and he tells them not to say anything about what they saw until after Easter. Why not? Here I might speculate a minute. Had Peter and James and John come down ranting and raving about what they had seen, Jesus glowing, Moses and Elijah talking to him, the voice of God thundering from the cloud, it might well have created jealousy among the disciples. The other nine might have felt belittled; “why didn’t Jesus take *me* up the mountain?” It might actually have endangered the disciples, who, believing in Jesus’ amazing power and authority, would wield swords when it came time for Jesus to be arrested, and thus led to their deaths before the resurrection had occurred.

But to mention such an amazing event may have distracted the disciples from what was coming next, what had to happen before a resurrection could occur: Jesus had to suffer and die. What I’d like you to get a handle on today is the simple fact that Jesus *came down the mountain* with the disciples after this event. In fact the first thing he and his disciples would encounter when they got down the mountain was an argument between the scribes and the rest of the disciples over their failure to heal a boy with an unclean spirit. What message would Peter and John and James take home from this? They had just seen Jesus glorified in front of them, standing with Israel’s two greatest prophets, and now he goes right back into the real world. It boggles the mind that the Son of God, who has just been seen in all his glory, would leave all of that to come down into the world where there will be controversy and suffering and rejection and death. Somehow, to see Jesus come back down after the transfiguration, and to continue to heal others, and to preach and teach and feed the hungry, and then to face the humiliation of the cross, to see the contrast between the glorified Son of the Living God and Jesus on a cross would make clear to Peter, James, and John the essence of God’s very nature and the very essence of the Gospel message: For God so loved the world…that he didn’t just stay on the mountaintop, but he came down.

And he told Peter and James and John to say nothing about what they had witnessed. Why? One pastor used this metaphor: having young children, he and his wife learned that there were some words that you could not say at the dinner table, words like “dessert,” or “cake.” Once their children heard these words, they were no longer interested in eating the meatloaf or the Brussels sprouts. When Jesus told Peter and John and James not to say anything, I believe that he didn’t want the rest of the disciples to be focused on the cake. Yes, Jesus would rise from the grave. Yes, he would defeat the powers of evil in this world and bring salvation to many, but not yet! There was still work to do. It was still a long way to go to Jerusalem.

So the takeaway, as we prepare to enter the season of Lent, is this: Trust in the glory, but don’t let it get in the way of discipleship. We have to eat our Brussels sprouts. It’s easy to get caught up in the glory of Christ, and to want to share that glory with him at the expense of discipleship. There are many Christians who simply endure the trials and tribulations of this world as they wait to get to heaven, to glory, where everything is peachy keen. But we are not called to endure but to overcome. Jesus didn’t stay on the mountaintop and wait for things to get better, and neither should we. The mountaintop can serve as an inspiration, a reminder that Jesus is the Son of God who reigns eternal. But as disciples, we need to follow Jesus down the mountain, into struggles and into suffering, and to heal and to teach. If the message that we give is nothing but glory and end of suffering, we are refusing to come down the mountain with Jesus.