

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 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. 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. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ 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.

Jesus Won’t Stand Still

The Transfiguration: the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany. If you think about the logic of the liturgical calendar, celebrating the Transfiguration today at the very end of the Season of Epiphany is very logical. The season of Epiphany is all about revealing Jesus as the Son of God through his words and deeds, and no doubt most of the things Jesus said and did, as awesome and amazing as they were, did not convince the average person that he was anything more than human – certainly he was a man of God, but a *man* nonetheless. At the Transfiguration we reach another level of revelation; Jesus’ appearance changes and his clothes are dazzling white, and the two most important men in Jewish history, Moses and Elijah, appear with Jesus. A voice, presumably God’s voice, tells the disciples that this is his son, his Chosen. While the disciples may not be convinced that Jesus is in all ways equal to God they would certainly believe that he and God are tight, that there’s a special relationship there.

And the Transfiguration marks a radical shift in our perception of Jesus as we move into the Season of Lent. In all the Gospels, it is around the time of the Transfiguration that Jesus starts to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where he will be rejected, humiliated, tortured, and killed, and then he will rise on the third day. Just eight verses after today’s reading Luke writes, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Take a moment to consider the contrast between the image of Jesus dazzling white and transfigured, standing with Moses and Elijah, and Jesus carry a cross to a hill where he will be nailed to it and forced to die a slow and very human death. That is a huge contrast, and I’m not so sure that we Christians always appreciated this radical departure from the spectacular to the horrendous.

Christians too often think like Peter on that mountaintop, wanting to build tents in that special place where Jesus is wonderful and beautiful, a place where we can just revel in this glorious ecstasy. I don’t know if any of you have ever had some religious experience where you just feel giddy as the joy and the thrill of being in the presence of something divine just overtake you, but if you haven’t you can probably relate to it by thinking of some great event in your life, like your wedding, a day and a place where you were overjoyed, where “Everything Is Awesome” as the

song from the Lego Movie tells us. And if you had the power to do so, you might want to just freeze that moment and dwell in it forever. If you could preserve that joy and that ecstasy you would be content.

By building your dwellings on top of a mountain, you hope to stay with this glorified, dazzling Jesus forever, but in so doing you leave everyone else down in the valley. You even leave your fellow disciples down there. And to you it may not matter because you are sitting pretty in this place with Jesus, and all seems well. Too often the Church has attempted to stay in one place that they believe to be ideal and just forget about the rest of the world – close their eyes to it; ignore it; even condemn it. Christians talk about living according to the Bible, and in a way that is an attempt to build a dwelling on a mountaintop. They think that by reading the Bible and never going against anything the Bible says they will dwell in paradise. And so they dismiss or label as “evil” anything that goes against what scripture says...or what they have been *told* scripture says. The Bible becomes your dwelling place, and you think that you can remain in there and be happy there. The United Methodist Church held a conference last week where a slight majority of delegates insisted that homosexuality is incompatible with a Christian lifestyle even though science has clearly shown that people are not born simple as male and female, that there is a broad spectrum of human sexuality, and if we bother to speak with anyone who identifies as gay or not-heterosexual they would tell you that this is the way they were created by the God who loves them and made no mistake in creating them just as they are. And they know that love does not turn a blind eye to the advances in scientific understanding, that love does not close its ears to the testimony on millions who say, “This is who I am; this is how God made me and he didn’t make a mistake.” But because the Bible says that God created us male and female we are prohibited from believing otherwise and so we must discriminate and marginalize and even condemn those who our loving God has made so wonderfully? The Christians who perpetuate these injustices are not just Methodists; there are plenty of Christians from all denominations who think likewise because “The Bible says...” There are Christians who believe that the Bible says that the universe is about 10,000 years old, even though scientific methods have shown that even the age of dinosaurs was over 60 million years ago. In the Bible, Jesus says that you should not divorce, and if you do it’s a sin. Do you believe divorce is a sin? When you leave your spouse to protect your own life and the life of your children, are you sinning against God? To believe this you’d have to believe in a cruel God, but some people do. Such people misuse the Bible in order to promote a doctrine that has no grounding in reality and no grounding in love, thus no grounding in God. Such people *think* that they have settled in a place where their eyes can remain fixed on a dazzling Christ who dwells with Moses and Elijah and their select group of mountain dwellers. But where is the true God, the God of love? Where is the God who cherishes his children, *all* his children?

One truth we do learn from the Bible is that God is on the move; he cannot be contained in a book or a doctrine or a religion – as I said last week; I don’t believe in a Christian *religion*; I believe in a Christian *faith*, and my faith is in a God who is loving and active and who is **mobile**, and wants us to move with him rather than build ourselves a dwelling where we want him to settle. God hasn’t settled. God never settles, and neither should we. In the first account of the Resurrection, in the Gospel of Mark, we find the women coming to a tomb looking for a dead Jesus, a settled Jesus, a Jesus who is contained in a cave. But the angel tells them, “He’s not here. He’s moved on. He’s in Galilee; go look for him there.”

Our church, and many others, have chosen to descend the mountain of Transfiguration, knowing that Jesus is God's chosen, but that Jesus is leading us down into the valley where there's ministry that needs to be done, where hatred and bigotry must be confronted. We may have to knock over a few tables to get the message across. Jesus did. And we can never experience the true glory of God unless we accompany Jesus on that hard road. May God give you insight to know where Jesus is leading you, and the will to follow him, even when that road gets a little bumpy.