

Mark 9:2-10

²Six 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.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

SIMPLY WATCHING JESUS

1. One of the blessings and curses of our modern life is the smart phone, which nowadays can do almost everything that a computer can do. Smart phones, laptops, and tablets are the tools of the trade for active, engaged, task-oriented people. Raise your hand if you are an active, engaged, task-oriented person. We are now able to keep in contact with everyone almost all of the time. We can conduct business and make plans and go shopping and find information instantly and continuously. My brother, who lives in Alaska and had resisted getting connected via internet, was actually offered a raise if he would invest in a smart phone that would enable him to communicate more effectively with his boss – sending pictures, documents, and other information instantly to and from the office to speed up business and make the firm more profitable. The smart phone had enabled us to get so much more done in far less time than it used to take.
2. And it’s not just for business use, as any teenager knows. Even though my phone is a bit slow because of all the music I’ve downloaded, you could ask me any question about most anything at all and I could do an internet search and give you some sort of answer in a matter of minutes. If I’m lonely I can quickly call a friend and plan to have lunch with him. I can even make a reservation and read a review of the restaurant we plan to visit. I can even locate my friends geographically and see if they are anywhere near the restaurant.
3. My generation likes to stay busy. We like to have something to do, and have access to a device that gives us something to do whenever we want to. In the off chance that I ever get bored I can download a game and play it until something more interesting happens. But this is not always a good thing. You see, having these devices can get in the way of deep, meaningful relationships. I’ve seen young couples on dates pulling out their smart phones and doing whatever they do *while they’re on a date!* Instead of looking each other in the eyes, they are looking down at their devices and texting away. Why? Because they’re nervous. Everyone is nervous on a date. You’re afraid you’ll say the

wrong thing or won't have anything interesting to say at all. You're afraid you'll be rejected, and the nice thing about your smart phone is it won't reject you. If you say something wrong to your wife, you can't just turn her off, but you can turn off your device. Gadgets are much safer than human beings.

4. But what we lose, in spending so much time with our gadgets, is meaningful human relationships. We need human relationships because without them we get lonely. A smart phone or a laptop or some game can keep us busy for days or weeks or years, but it leaves us feeling empty. I don't care how much you like gaming, you will never attain the wonderful feeling of being loved and being in love that you can gain from a relationship with a living, breathing human being. Because computers don't know us and don't care about us. My pedometer gives me a happy face and tells me what a wonderful job I've done in walking today, but do you think it really cares? A human relationship is vital because we have a need to love and be loved. What makes a relationship so special? When we make a mistake, when we sin, the other person doesn't just shut down or erase the sin from memory; the other person forgives. The other person loves you despite your flaws. The other person exhibits grace, and that is what makes a person giddy when in love. *Despite all my hang-ups and flaws and inadequacies, this person loves me!* A computer cannot love us.
5. We have to be careful as Christians of becoming so task-oriented that we forget the relationship. We like to stay occupied with tasks, even as Christians. We attempt to restrict our worship services to a single hour, and in that hour there are 22 different components of our service – count them. What would happen if we just came here and prayed, and sang the same song repeatedly? How many of us would start to feel uncomfortable, start looking our watches...or playing with our smart phones? Are we even capable of focusing our attention on God, without all the embellishments, without all the formalities, for a fraction of an hour? And with regards to our ministries, how easy is it for us to serve God without even thinking about God, to go from one task to the next, automatically, constantly staying busy and feel fully confident that we are doing God's will, as if God has simply given us a very long to-do list which we work on all through life until we die and walk through those pearly gates?
6. I think Jesus' disciples were like us in many ways; they were task-oriented folks bent on listening and then doing what Jesus required them to do. They were good employees wanting to please their boss. But like us, I think they had a difficult time just slowing down and appreciating the mere presence of Jesus. We're more comfortable when we're busy. But on this Transfiguration Sunday, and in the upcoming days of Lent, I challenge you to slow down and just dwell in God's presence.
7. In today's gospel reading, Jesus takes Peter, John and James up the mountain, and the only purpose he has in doing so is to have them witness something, and witness something they do! Jesus' clothes become whiter than white, and he meets Moses and Elijah, two important prophets from centuries past who were probably presumed dead.

Peter, being the task-oriented fellow that he was and not content to simply watch this event as spectacular as it was, suggests building something – something to keep him occupied. God intervenes and tells him the Jesus is his beloved and to listen to him. “Stop thinking about doing something, Peter. Just shut up and watch and listen.”

8. And if we were up on that mountaintop I think God would tell us the same thing. “Stop thinking about doing something for the time being. Just look and listen.

See Jesus dazzling white. You may have thought he was just a teacher or a healer doing nice deeds, teaching good ethics, telling you how to please God. He’s more than a teacher. He’s more than a healer. He is Lord and he is Savior. Be in awe as you dwell in his presence. Savor the experience!

See Jesus standing with Elijah and Moses. Yes, Elijah and Moses! Perhaps you thought they were dead, long gone. But here they are. How can this be? Did you think that God had to obey the rules of mortality? Did you forget that God makes the rules and can bend them or break them at will? It might help you to know that master himself will be breaching that boundary between life and death in a few months.

9. We’ve been good, busy-bodied Christians over the years, but have we stopped to have a good look at our Lord? Have we seen him as more than our teacher and healer but as the very image of God who transcends death and eliminates all boundaries to live and indeed die among us? This is where our attention must be as we enter the season of Lent. We are not called to move mountains *for* Jesus; we’re called to move mountains *with* Jesus. We’re called to accompany him, to dwell with him, to stay at his side where we can overcome the fear that can overwhelm us as we stand so often in opposition to the ways of this world. We need to watch Jesus, and dwell with him, not run off to do things for him. That will be our focus during Lent; walking with Jesus as he comes down the mountain and makes his way to Jerusalem. Let us take the time this Lent, to dwell with him, not just spend an hour a week at church, but spend hours each week in prayer and in the presence of other believers that we may see Jesus, the one who transcends death itself, in all his glory, the glory of God himself.