

BIBLE READINGS: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 Mark 9:2-9

SERMON

Peter James and John climbed a mountain. In more ways than one. Chosen by Jesus to accompany him, they had reached the pinnacle of their time as disciples. As they climbed the steep side of the mountain, they were unaware that Jesus would soon climb another mountain on which he would die. They were blissfully unaware - Peter's statement "You are the Messiah" (8:29) had turned on a light. Jesus was revealed. Even his talking about death and sacrifice couldn't dim their excitement. And then there was Jesus' promise - "I tell you, there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power." (9:1)

So they climbed the mountain; there they saw something that barely could be described, and then they came down the mountain and began the final journey to Jerusalem.

Let us climb the mountain to see what Peter, James and John saw.

In Exodus 24:16 we read that God called Moses from the cloud that covered the mountain and Moses went up the mountain. We read that Moses ascended the mountain after six days. What do we find in 9:2? After six days Jesus takes his disciples up the mountain, and there he is transformed - "metamorphothi" - transformed into a new, different, holy, awesome being. And then in 9:4 Moses and Elijah appear - Moses, the representative of the law we understand. The connection has already been made, but why Elijah? Well, like Moses, he met with God on a mountain. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah meets with God. Elijah also represents the prophets. Both men, representing the law and the prophets, whose mountaintop experiences had so transformed them, are seen by the disciples. Imagine their fear and awe at the glory and wonder of it all!

And then the cloud appears - this is the "shekinah" - God revealed and yet God still hidden. And a voice from out of the cloud repeats the words from Jesus' Baptism - "This is my own dear son - listen to him!" (9:7). This is the pivotal moment of the Gospel. Everything hinges upon this event.

Once Jesus was revealed as the Messiah by Peter, it was the end of the beginning. From that moment Jesus began to teach his disciples about his death and resurrection. From the top of the mountain they will slide to the very depths of despair and disillusionment.

We can climb that mountain, and with the disciples encounter the Shekinah of God. But would we understand the glory and majesty of the moment? The disciples certainly didn't understand. Peter earlier had earned Jesus' rebuke for trying to get him to cheer up (8:32,33). Now Peter suggests to Jesus making some booths for himself, Moses and Elijah. Peter was aware he saw the Kingdom of God come in power. He was aware that God was revealing himself in his glory. But after the voice speaks from the cloud, the mountaintop is empty. Peter has missed the point. And in fact it is only after the resurrection that Peter finally realises what Jesus has been on about.

You see, the Glory of God was revealed in Jesus ultimately, when he climbed that other mountain and was lifted up on a cross, and died the death of a criminal - when his blood flowed, and he was all alone in his agony and pain - there Jesus' glory was revealed.

When we climb the mountain and experience the glory of God, let us remember the cost. Jesus said that he would be put to death. But he also promised he would rise to life. This is the cost, this is the glory.

And remember also what else Jesus said - "If anyone wants to come with me, they must forget themselves, carry their cross and follow me. This is the cost of discipleship - the glory of our walk with Jesus is that we are transformed, we become beings of light - as Paul describes it - "God shines his light into our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ" (2Cor.4:6)

Let's never forget that the glory of God is revealed in sacrificial giving - in agape love - as a person willingly lays down their life for their beloved. God loves us and wants his glory to be revealed in our lives. Let's be ready to die to ourselves and live for Christ. For it is only as we bear our cross and climb the hill of Calvary that we will be transformed - only there will our selves find death - death to our lust, our greed, our fear, our envy, our pride, our sin. It is only as we climb that hill and cling to the foot of that cross and experience the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus our crucified Lord that we can really experience our own transfiguration.

The painter Raphael's greatest joy was to paint scenes from the life of Christ. His last work, the culmination of years of study; was "The Transfiguration". It was scarcely finished when he became ill, and so he had the picture hung in his sickroom. When he died, the picture was hung above the body, and as the crowds came to pay their last respects, they saw above him the vision which had so transfigured his life and empowered his creative genius. As we turn to face the glory of God, May our lives also be transfigured - may we glow with an inner light.