

SERMON

Charlie Brown and Linus are lying on a hill looking up at the sky.

"Aren't the clouds beautiful? They look like big balls of cotton... I could just lie here all day, and watch them drift by... If you use your imagination, you can see lots of things in the cloud formations... What do you think you see, Linus?"

"Well, those clouds up there look like the map of the British Honduras on the Caribbean... That cloud up there looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor... And that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen... I can see the apostle Paul standing there to one side..."

"Uh huh... That's very good... What do you see in the clouds, Charlie Brown?"

"Well, I was going to say I saw a ducky and a horsie, but I changed my mind!"

The Transfiguration story makes me think of Charlie Brown and Linus looking at the clouds; Our experiences of the divine can be so different! Its easy to feel a little self-conscious when your own religious experiences seem so plain and mundane compared to others amazing miraculous encounters. When your personal religious experience contains no bright flashes or red-hot emotions, no defining moments of transcending clarity, no poetic, mystical exuberance – it can make you feel quite plain and ordinary. Yet that doesn't mean that those of us whose spiritual lives are more hum-drum – pedestrian, can't get inside the story the an amazing spiritual experience we call The Transfiguration.

Soren Kierkegaard told a parable about how to do this: *There were two young people, one a German girl, the other an English boy. They met on the beach in France; they conversed in high school French. After returning to their respective homes, the girl wrote the boy a passionate letter in German, which he did not know.*

First; he laboriously translated it, using grammar books and dictionaries and lexicons. But, he did not stop there. He put aside the intellectual work and read the letter for what it was; a love letter from a girl; a love letter aimed at his heart, not at his head.

So it is with stories like the Transfiguration. While we mustn't turn off our brains in looking at it, we can't stop at the rational level, we must remember to remember that it is – as are all the stories in the Bible - a letter of love aimed at the heart. Mark wrote this story to touch our hearts, to let us know something important about the love of God for us.

One way of looking at, listening to, hearing the story of the Transfiguration is through the mind of a child, through the simple words of See – Hear – Go.

What did they see? We must remember that this was a vision, a thing seen! So the important question is not what actually happened, what factually occurred. The important question is what did the disciples report that they saw; what was revealed to them.

So, again what did they see? They saw light and clouds which are ancient symbols of God's presence; remember the Exodus through the desert, God lead the Children of Israel with a cloud by day and a fire, a light, by night. The disciples saw God's presence and guidance, a cloud and a fire, on Jesus.

They saw Moses and Elijah. In Jewish tradition Moses represented the Law and Elijah stood for the Prophets. In Jewish Tradition, both Moses and Elijah were to return before the Messiah, The appearance of Moses and Elijah signalled to the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah.

Moses and Elijah give Jesus their blessing and then the disciples see Jesus' alone: this shows that Jesus completes, fulfills, the Law and the Prophets.

What did they hear? They heard divine speech silence human speech: vs. 5 – “while he was still speaking.” They heard a command to listen to Jesus: vs. 5 – “listen to him.” They heard from Jesus the Gospel: vs. 7 – “get up and do not be afraid!”

Through the eyes of Peter, James and John we have seen the vision, we have heard the voices.

How are we called to respond? Where are we to go?

First, we are called to the mountain. Not to blinding lights and booming voices but to time apart with Christ. We are called to look at Christ with awe and hope and love, we are called to listen to his commands to love one another with body, mind and soul.

Then, we are called off the mountain and back into life. Like Peter, we want to stay on a spiritual high but we can't stay, we have to go back down to where life is lived for real.

For it is down here, and out there, in our homes and schools and jobs and communities in the mundane, ordinary, “so-called” real world that real faith is lived out. That is where we live our faith, that is where we shine the light of Christ, because that is where that it is needed most.

And that is where God has sent us.

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