

Mark 9:1-9

Come – I want to take you on a journey – let’s take a walk with Peter up the mountain. Imagine walking in his footsteps, the breathtaking view around you, brisk morning air with light dew on the ground, the birds are waking up and the forest critters are scrambling, and you...you are walking along side Jesus. Cool huh? But imagine being Peter, you would have much on your mind.

All four gospels tell similar stories about Peter, the one who always seems to be in Jesus’ face asking questions, jumping in the water with both feet. Peter, the one who eagerly insists Jesus wash not only his feet, but his hands and face as well. Peter who says he will never ever forsake Jesus. Peter has much on his mind because earlier Jesus, asked him, “Who do you say that I am?” to which Peter responded “The Messiah.” Peter truly believes. But when Jesus tells of his imminent suffering and death Peter is so frightened he goes into denial which only adds to the burden he is carrying today.

If you are still standing in Peter’s shoes, do you hear Jesus tell you he is going to die a gruesome death? Can you fathom such devastating news? Midst pain and confusion, fear and anxiety, we, face similar trials and tribulations in our own lives. When Jesus introduces the cross into the conversation, Peter cannot handle it; neither can we.

We question God when a child suffers from abuse and neglect; we cry out in denial when a loved one is snatched from our lives; when cancer and tsunamis strike we fear for our very existence. How much more difficult would it be then to hear someone predict his or her own death?

It is hard to grasp everything that is happening as we hike up the mountain with Peter, James, John, and Jesus. Up and up we go on this long winding road. Can you hear the rustle of the leaves beneath your feet? Can you feel the pebbles through your sandals? When we finally reach the top of this very high mountain we breathe deeply, taking it all in.

We may be in a fog, much like Peter, contemplating all that has happened - wondering where Jesus is leading us this time. Then it happens, we witness a most incredible sight; the glory of God radiating in, around, and through Jesus - so “dazzling white”, and brighter than anything on earth.

I doubt we can recreate this sensation but maybe it’s similar to the brave souls who climb tall rugged mountains, stand at the edge of the cliff, lean forward and drop off... maybe you’ve seen them...when they open their arms gently catching the breeze they soar and glide in web-like suits enabling them to fly like a bird. Exhilarating I am sure...but not even close to what Peter feels; which may be why he blurts out “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us build a dwelling for each of you.” Or maybe it is an attempt to capture the moment, to freeze time, in hopes this could last forever. Such an astonishing and amazing moment was chosen specifically for Peter, James and John. However, similar revelations can occur in our lives - not just on mountain tops.

I believe God is cloaked in the ordinary...perhaps more often than we realize. God is present in a dazzling field of sunflowers; God is in the sky-reaching evergreens of the north where loons cry out in the wee morning hours. God is present in the mountains and in the valleys, from the vast oceans to the smallest drop of rain. God's presence is often more readily accepted by children as reflected in the song "Help Pour Out the Rain." Buddy Jewel sings about his daughter who "playing twenty questions" asks

*"Daddy, when we get to heaven can I taste the Milky Way?"*

*"Are we going there to visit or are we going there to stay?"*

*"Am I gonna see my grandpa? Can I have a pair of wings?"*

*"Do you think that God could use another angel to help pour out the rain?"*

Oswald Chambers, a Scottish minister and inspirational author believes we should approach God with the innocence of child. Sometimes Peter is childlike, and he certainly asks a lot of questions. However, when overwhelmed by the presence of God, he is at a loss for words. We too, might blurt out as did Peter when there are no words to describe such a moment.

Yes, we are like Peter, or the very least we can hope to have a portion of his caliber. As human beings, we too make mistakes, fall short of the glory of God, and often take two steps backward for every step forward.

There are those who criticize Peter saying he is dense, that he just doesn't get it. I say we may want to be careful – it is like "the pot calling the kettle black"...as my mom would say. We "the disciples on the bright side of Easter" have an advantage over Peter. How could Peter possibly have known or understood what was happening? It is easy for us with hindsight; who know the rest of the story. Although I sometimes wonder, even with this vantage point do we get it? And yet guided by faith, we don't need to understand it completely. I find comfort in knowing there is more than what my little mind can comprehend. Thank God there is more. If the grand scheme of things were up to me I may be tempted to stay close within my comfort zone. Fortunately, when we are asked to take a certain road and put our faith in God, God guides and protects us wherever that path may lead.

Like Peter today. Are you still with me on that mountain? Emotions run high, as Jesus leads Peter back down the mountain. Let's tag along... down, down we go into a valley where Peter will be put to the test once again. For Jesus this path will lead to a new mountain, Mt Golgotha. And for Peter an even darker valley. Imagine gut wrenching, heart pounding fear mounting inside of Peter not knowing what lies ahead. Peter's rollercoaster emotions of fear and denial, anxiety and disbelief surprise us, yet I pause to wonder why. Maybe Peter's actions are just a little too close for comfort. Perhaps we see ourselves in Peter.

That's ok. Because in spite of his errant ways, Peter rises to the challenge, he picks himself up and brushes himself off. And that is precisely what we are called to do. From the beginning, just as Peter drops his net and follows Jesus, we too are asked to drop everything and follow Christ.

From there we are asked to step outside of our comfort zone, to climb that mountain, to travel the valley into the shadows of the darkness. But remember, we are not alone; God picks us up when we fall. Just as Peter is sustained so are we.

Peter, the first disciple to be chosen by Jesus; Simon Peter the Rock upon which the church is built. We are that church – you and I, a piece of the rock upon which to build. We are the body of Christ uniting all believers as we welcome our new members today. The moment you walked into Trinity you were part of this family. Together we follow Jesus to a mountain top and witness his transfiguration. Right before our very eyes we, along with Peter, catch a glimpse into eternal life. The Greek word for transfiguration is ‘Metamorphe’ (as in metamorphosis). It literally means ‘changed in form.’ Paul uses the same word to describe the presence of the Spirit in the heart of a believer.

As Lent approaches, we believers are given an opportunity to once again be changed as we sharpen our focus through self reflection, contemplation, and repentance. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of this journey guided by the light of Christ. For God said; “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Through Bible study, worship, and prayer Christ is the flame that illumines our lives on mountain tops, in valleys, and everywhere.

Carry this torch with you today and throughout the season.

Sing “Shine Jesus Shine.” Ask the Spirit to set your hearts on fire and

Listen...

For this is the Word of God. Amen

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