

Confirm It, Then Share It

March 2, 2014

Matthew 17:1-9

1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli'jah, talking with him. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah." 5 He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead."

Have you ever been to the top of a mountain where it seems like you can see forever? Have you ever been to the top of a mountain and seen its sweeping beauty? You stand there and slowly rotate for 360 degrees, and no matter in which direction you look, you see pure beauty and the majesty of the world that our God created. It can be awe inspiring and humbling to be above and looking down. Our perception changes and suddenly what was, is now different.

There are not only mountaintop experiences that happen on actual mountains; but there are what are called "mountaintop religious experiences." These are those special times when you see with utmost clarity who God is. When there is no fog, no haze, no trees, no obstructions, and there, for a moment, in that mountaintop religious experience, you see with utter clarity a vision of who God really is. You know for sure that the vision is true and it changes you forever.

In the Bible, the fundamental mountaintop experience in the Old Testament is called a "theophany." "Theo" meaning God in the Greek language; "epiphany" meaning revelation.

The Theophany we probably know the best from the Old Testament is Moses on Mount Sinai. On the mountaintop, Moses saw a clear revelation of God. When Moses came down from the mountain, it was like Moses' faith radiated from his very being. His face was shining like the sun because Moses had had this mountaintop experience where God was revealed. Moses walked down the mountain with the Ten Commandments, to share what God revealed with everyone. If Moses was our measure for the mountaintop experience in the Old Testament, the New Testament also has a mountaintop story and the report of a mountaintop experience. In the New Testament, this mountaintop is called the Transfiguration. It is the mountaintop story for today.

(Read Scripture Here)

Peter, James and John were on the mountaintop with Jesus. The name of the mountaintop is not given but most scholars think that it was Mount Tabor which is 1800 feet tall and is a tall mountain not far from Nazareth. While on that mountain, the eyes of the disciples were dazzled with visionary ecstasy. Jesus was transfigured before them. He was literally changed before their eyes. Transfigured. Transformed. The Greek word for this is "metamorphosis." "Meta" means change; "morphis" means form. Jesus' form was totally changed. ... Like a cocoon is transfigured into a butterfly. Like a flower bulb

is transfigured into a flower. On top of this mountain is where the human Jesus of Nazareth was transfigured into the divine Christ.

Think of it like this. We all have seen the fireworks from Fourth of July right? Bursting and beautiful and filled with this amazing light that is an awesome sight to see in the night sky. However one of my favorite things to do is play with sparklers. It is like a magic stick, ordinary at first but once it goes through fire it turns into this amazing and beautiful sight.

When Jesus was on that mountain top he encountered the past leaders of the church, those who had established the laws and the prophecies, those who were revered by God's people, yet God called out and proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, God's beloved son. The old was gone and the new was to be the promise and potential that the world needed. He was considered an ordinary Rabbi with some perhaps radical ideals to his Disciples but after this moment of transfiguration he is no longer ordinary but extraordinary and his divinity is confirmed.

We have a banner at Camp Christian in Ohio that hangs in the gym. It is one that has consistently resonated with me and is one I hold near and dear in my ministerial philosophy. It reads "take from the alters of the past the fire not the ashes."

We as the church go through times when we are under fire. We are constantly under fire for our beliefs, under fire for the actions of others that call our beliefs into question. Have you ever noticed when we talk about our faith we define ourselves in a variety of ways and that we do not typically claim ourselves as Christians first, rather we state that we are Episcopalian, Catholic, Methodist, or Disciples. The umbrella term Christian has been so abused and misused that we have to define ourselves as more, as different from those others.

The church today is under fire. We are being tempered in the flames of media, and injustice. We are being asked what our beliefs are because the world hears our words but does not see our words confirmed by our actions.

One of the most famous of speeches is "I have a dream". We know this one it is familiar and it is still a poignant call for justice and equality. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaims that he has been to the mountain top and he sees the promise and the potential for the world. He sees the promised land. So profound right? To think of that promised land to vision what it might hold and what it would look like. This begs the question: what is our promised land as the faithful people of God, as we are under the fire, being transformed into the new faith, the faith of this century, what promised land do we see? What is our vision for today, tomorrow, one year from now, 5 years from now, 20 years, 50? Finally how do we get to the promised land?

There is a song our called "The Climb". I heard it again recently and it got me thinking about how in order to get to the mountaintop we have to go through a lot. Just hear these words:

I can almost see it

That dream I'm dreaming but

There's a voice inside my head saying,

You'll never reach it,

Every step I'm taking,
Every move I make feels
Lost with no direction

My faith is shaking but I
Got to keep trying
Got to keep my head held high

(Chorus)

There's always going to be another mountain
I'm always going to want to make it move
Always going to be an uphill battle,
Sometimes I'm gonna to have to lose,
Ain't about how fast I get there,
Ain't about what's waiting on the other side
It's the climb

The struggles I'm facing,
The chances I'm taking
Sometimes might knock me down but
No I'm not breaking
I may not know it
But these are the moments that
I'm going to remember most yeah
Just got to keep going
And I,
I got to be strong
Just keep pushing on, cause

(Chorus x2)

(The Climb-Miley Cyrus)

We as the church will be under a lot of fire, we will be transformed and made new, and once we have made that climb up to the next mountaintop we will see the promise and the potential that our faith brings to the world, the hope and the love that we know and that we find in our faith everyday. We will see the work of God, through Christ in the world, We will see the confirmation of our faith in action so we like the Disciples can go out and it will be a glorious day to share what we have seen. Amen.