

They Saw Only Jesus

2 Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-9

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Mark 9:2-9

Six 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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then 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." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

As 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.



(Sung)

I heard my mother say.

I heard my mother say.

I heard my mother say, "Give me Jesus." Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.

You may have all this world. Give me Jesus.

Wow. This is a "wow" story. It has all the extraordinary elements that constitute a "wow" story. We are on a high mountain with Jesus and his close companions. It is a spiritual retreat, *par excellence*. Jesus is transfigured, changed, and seen in a new way. His clothes are bright white, whiter than earthly possible. Already we are witnessing something otherworldly.

Then it gets better. Elijah and Moses show up. Elijah, you will remember, did not die but was taken up to heaven in a sweet chariot of fire that swung low and carried him home to God. And here they are, Elijah, the prophet, Moses, the Law giver, and Jesus. Peter, the spokesperson for this "wow" event, thinks this is the end of time, the coming of God, and shouts out his willingness to set up the ritual tents to commemorate this happening with the construction of booths, like were erected by Moses after the crossing the Red Sea during the Exodus from Egypt.

Then we have a cloud overshadow them, a spiritual phenomenon without form or substance, from which the Divine voice announces that Jesus is the Son of God, God's beloved one, and the disciples are told to listen to him. After which, when the three men looked around, they saw no Elijah, no Moses, no cloud, only Jesus.

(Sung☺)

At midnight was my cry,

at midnight was my cry,

at midnight was my cry, "Give me Jesus." Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.

You may have all this world. Give me Jesus.

I am not going to explain this "wow" experience. It cannot be explained. No real "mountain top" experience can be explained. The phrase "you had to be there" was invented for this very kind of happening. I can, however, point to some connections which will, I believe, help us in discerning God's message for us. This scripture comes in the middle of the gospel of Mark. It ties together the baptism of Jesus at the beginning of the gospel with the resurrection of Jesus at the end. It draws the disciples into the holy history of God and God's people. And, perhaps, most importantly, the story ends with Jesus and his friends going down the mountain, going back to the work of teaching and healing, moving ever closer to Jerusalem and all that will happen there.

This scripture, the transfiguration on the mount, is the lesson each year just before Lent. This coming Wednesday we will have ashes marked upon our foreheads (some of us) as a sign of our humanity and our humility. We are not meant to live on the mountain top. There is work to be done. There is service to be performed. Still, we are at a high place for a reason; two reasons, actually. The first reason is to remind us that we are Easter people. Yes. Even though the resurrection was still to come in the gospel story, we have a foretaste of it here. We share with Jesus the glory of God as shone on the mountain top. We share in this transfigured vision. Wherever we go, we cannot say we have not seen "the light." We have and we are changed forever. The second reason for stopping at this high place is that it gives us a perspective on where to go next. There is always the temptation to stay there, to set up a dwelling place on the mountain, to sustain that "wowness" perpetually. But that is not the Jesus Way. Rather we are called into the places of life and struggle and suffering, to bring light and hope and healing.

It is instructive for me that the text says, after the vision of the Hebrew patriarchs and voice from cloud, that they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. Only Jesus. Only a Jewish man. Only a poor itinerant prophet. Only a man of flesh and blood. Only a person like us.

That is a “wow” that is even greater to comprehend than Old Testament visions and celestial voices. God is revealed in a human being.

As they travel down the mountain and into the towns to minister to the poor and the oppressed, the marginalized and the hopeless, the lost and the lonely, they travel with the knowledge that God is working through human finitude, human limitations, even human weaknesses, to perform God’s will. Wow! The real work and message was not on the mountain but in the world.

Rodney Hunter puts it this way: *"Jesus' mission was not to make a big deal of himself or to elevate his followers to positions of power, authority, and prestige through identification with him. It was rather to point through and beyond himself to God and to God's coming reign on earth, and to invite his followers to find their voice in bearing witness to this transforming, redemptive God"* (Feasting on the Word).

(Sung)

Oh when I come to die.

Oh when I come to die.

Oh when I come to die. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.

You may have all this world. Give me Jesus.

The transformative, redeeming, life-abundant salvation of God is not to be found on a mountain top after a hard and difficult journey. It is here with us now. This is the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. God’s glory is given to us in the ordinary stories of our lives, our pain, our struggle, our dreams and our hopes. God is with us. Now. This place. This time. You and I. This is both the mountain top and the valley. This place, this time, you and I. This is the meeting of glory and of suffering. Each of us is worthy. Each of us is capable of shining forth the transfigured love of God that we know from following Jesus. There is no secret password, no magic ritual to access God’s healing light. It is within us, each of us, and within our neighbor.

(Sung)

In the morning, when I rise.

In the morning, when I rise.

In the morning, when I rise. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.

You may have all this world. Give me Jesus.

Let us pray. Amen.