

**“Wouldya look at That?”**  
**Mark 9:2-9**  
**The Transfiguration of Jesus**  
**February 14, 2021**

*Theophany--a direct vision or experience of God. Three disciples of Jesus are in for a real treat or perhaps a true fright when they are led up a high mountain and there, they see Jesus transfigured into a heavenly being, clad in bright white, flanked on either side by Moses and Elijah. How does it change them? What does it mean for us? Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church in Mark 9:2-9:*

Six days later, three of them *did* see it. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them. Elijah, along with Moses, came into view, in deep conversation with Jesus.

Peter interrupted, “Rabbi, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.” He blurted this out without thinking, stunned as they all were by what they were seeing.

Just then a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and from deep in the cloud, a voice: “This is my Son, marked by my love. Listen to him.”

The next minute the disciples were looking around, rubbing their eyes, seeing nothing but Jesus, only Jesus.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy. “Don’t tell a soul what you saw. After the Son of Man rises from the dead, you’re free to talk.” They puzzled over that, wondering what on earth “rising from the dead” meant.

*Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.*

Let’s step back a moment and *really* think about the emotion of this passage in Mark. Picture yourself as one of the disciples—any of them, including women who kept close to Jesus. We—the disciples—are sitting around an early morning campfire, having shivered our way through the cold Galilee night. Jesus has had us on the march and last night we camped God-knows-where at the base of a tall hill, so tall that we call it a mountain.

After a breakfast of fish and cakes, Jesus picks you, Peter, and one other disciple saying, “Follow me.” You go at once because that’s what disciples do! Up, up, you and the other disciples climb, exchanging glances and questioning faces with one another, but not daring to speak. Jesus is on a mission: no time for laggards, no time for talkers. Even Peter stays quiet.

Out of breath, you are finally brought to a level place on the steep slope. And the most amazing sight unfolds before your eyes! Jesus transforms right in front of you. His worn and dusty robes, his torn sandals and knotted hair, his haggard face and sad eyes change into something unrecognizable to you, something, well, like a *makeover*.

He shines, his clothes now a shimmering white. He looks rested, confident and hero-like. Two figures are then brought into sharp focus, flanking him on either side. “Wouldya look at that?” you exclaim to the other disciples, and they look at you with eyes open wide. On either side of Jesus appear two pillars of your faith, persons or figures that you recognize as being important—vitaly important—to who you are, to what you believe, to what you will be about as a disciple of Jesus. You each see your own, unique representations of your faith history.

For Peter, these two faith heroes are figures from Jewish antiquity: Moses, the law-giver and Elijah, the prophet of compassion and justice. Two personalities stand before him engaged in conversation with the Messiah, *your* Messiah. He can’t make out what they are saying, but he knows he is being treated to a fantastic spectacle! As Peter is wont to do, he blurts out, “Rabbi, this a great moment! Let’s build three memorials—one for you one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

You expect Jesus to respond to Peter's excited praises, but instead, the sky breaks open as it did the day Jesus was baptized-remember? A "light-radiant" cloud then appears and you hear from deep within it a voice. Do you hear it with your ears or only in your head? The voice says, "This is my Son, marked by my love. Listen to him!" And then the other figures standing with Jesus are gone and you are left rubbing your eyes and trying to understand what has just happened.

Who did you see standing with Jesus? Were they relatives of yours who passed away during your life or even generations before? Were they historical characters who you admire for what they stood for? Were they fictional characters who boldly spoke what you could only hope to? Or still another faith teacher from another category?

Use your chat box and name your two pillars. Who inspires you? Who motivates you? Just name names for now. You can stay after the service and talk about why you chose who you did. For now, just put in the names and then we will make a Name Cloud out of them. I'll sit quietly for a minute so you can log in your answers.

...Here is our name cloud, a vast array of teachers for who we are grateful, for they connected the dots of faith for us and helped us to know God's unconditional love and desire for personal relationship with us.

For the Messianic Jews of Mark's day, these are not just two Joe-Blow names. Next to Jesus, Moses was the best-known and most venerated of all the Israelite heroes. Listen, as Don Wick reads for us what Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible says about Moses:

Moses is among the Bible's most complex and vivid characters. This is partly because varying accounts of his life and teachings have been fused. To some extent Moses is idealized: he is the epitome of pious humility and functions as prophet, priest, judge, and king. Later figures may be depicted as Moses-like—Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Josiah, Jesus—yet Moses remains a unique phenomenon, not so much by his internal greatness as by his unparalleled intimacy with God.

It is Moses who Yahweh calls from a burning bush to deliver Israel from the grip of Pharaoh.

It is Moses who leads God's enslaved people to safety when they flee Pharaoh. Yahweh, by the outstretched hand of Moses parts the waters of the Red Sea so they may pass through unharmed.

It is Moses who, at Yahweh's direction, leads the freed people across the desert toward the Promised Land of Canaan.

It is Moses who climbs Mount Sinai where Yahweh-God carves upon stones the Ten Commandments. Meanwhile, the people forget God's grace and they worship idols. Moses displays righteous anger and destroys the tablets on which the laws are written. He is then called back up the mountain where God again gives him the Ten Commandments. While on the mountain the second time it is said in Exodus 32-34 that Moses had an almost direct experience of God during which he is *transformed—his face is either radiant or burnt*.

Many persons refer to Jesus as the "second Moses." Next to Jesus himself, Messianic Jews of Mark's Day hold Moses up as **the** icon of their faith tradition.

The second person appearing on the mountain next to Jesus is the Prophet, Elijah. Unlike Moses, who is a mythical creation of Jewish lore, Elijah is an historical figure who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the 9th-century reign of King Ahab. The king's wife, Jezebel, worshipped Baal, and to appease his wife, Ahab allowed for freedom of worship within his kingdom. It was

against this backdrop that Elijah was raised up by God to defeat the tradition of Baal and restore Israel to right relationship with God. He proclaimed to the people that Yahweh is just and compassionate, God who “defends the weak and gives life to the powerless.” Elijah was threatened by Jezebel and forced to flee for his life. In tradition, he did not die a mortal death, but was “taken up to heaven by a whirlwind.”

Elijah was expected by Jews to return as the forerunner to the coming Day of Yahweh and expected to reconcile humanity in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus became known, many thought he was Elijah and not the Messiah himself. As Moses was the most prominent figure of ancient Judaism, Elijah was the standout who was called by Yahweh to signal the coming of a new age where law and mercy would be joined together. When Jesus is transformed—transfigured—on the mountaintop, he is the fulfillment of the two great values of Yahweh. And just like Moses and Elijah who both are persecuted by the establishment and rejected by the people, so too will Jesus be subjected to suffering and betrayal. But he foretells also that on the third day after his death he will rise again and return in glory.

The disciples don’t want to hear any of this, for they are “determined” writes Marilyn McCord Adams in her commentary on this passage, “to make Jesus the hero of their horizontal worlds and the vehicle of their own this-worldly ambitions.” They don’t want to “listen to him!” They turn a deaf ear to his predictions that he—and they—will have to take up the cross, suffer, and die. They want Jesus to stay with them as their Rabbi and protector. They do not have the spiritual maturity to fathom his crucifixion and resurrection and the paradigm

shift in their finite worldview that will come as a result. That is why they are not allowed to tell of what they have seen on the mountaintop.

What is the lesson of the Transfiguration for us? I resonate with Professor Rodney J. Hunter's summation:

The transfiguration is therefore also a powerful word to *us* to take up our cross and follow Christ, to walk in his way that in one way or another will provoke the powers against us, but that ultimately discloses the eternal truth and trustworthiness of God's nonviolent love and justice in the midst of evil... [This is] the **transforming power of divine love, a powerful, assertive love that does not dominate and defeat evil so much as challenge, expose, and seek to transform it.**

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This is a powerful takeaway from this scripture passage, as true today as it was in Mark's day. Just like we have our own wisdom teachers and faith leaders, we also cast our own demons and name evil so that it is not us, not our intentions, assumptions, judgments, or actions. Funny how that is: as history is typically written by the victors, the labeling of "evil" is always labeled such by those who consider themselves virtuous and above reproach.

If Yahweh God calls you up that mountain and treats you to a vision of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, then it is incumbent upon you to recognize how special is God's love for you, for us, for all people—those you honor and those you label "evil," too. God never calls us to sit on the couch and eat chocolates. God calls us to the path less traveled, the way of the cross. We will suffer and we will be rejected for the message of universal, unconditional love—such is the life of a disciple. But when Jesus calls us to follow him and when the voice of God tells

us to “Listen to him!” it is not a mere suggestion for when we have the time and when we are of a mind. Professor Hunter concludes:

The transfiguration story is a call to affirm the ultimate truth of this contrary claim of God and God’s way of salvation, and to begin living it with all our heart, soul, and strength in the confidence that Jesus’ nonviolent way is truly the way of salvation, healing, and eternal life.

*May It Be So.*

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