

Sermon 2- 11, 2018

Transforming suffering into glory Mark 9:2-9

Dear Reflector's of the Lord's glory:

Do you ever feel like we are losing? Do you ever think that we Christians are under assault for our faith by the secular culture that surrounds us? Consider the following...

- In Illinois, an employee of a national insurance company was fired for writing an op-ed in support of traditional marriage, even though he did it on his own time and on his own computer
- The tenets of our faith are sometimes under attack in secular education when those who confess faith in God creating the world in 6 days as the Bible says are derided as fools
- Satan uses the world system constantly to entice and wear down believers in Jesus
- A well-known TV host on cable constantly belittles Christians with vicious blasphemous attacks.
- An employee of an Idaho computer company was fired after displaying Bible verses in his cubicle.
- The TV series known as the Big Bang Theory constantly portrays Christians as fools and unbelievers as the smart people.

We live in a fallen world. We live in a corrupt, sin-cursed society. As believers we are not to be surprised when we encounter difficulties. Jesus once said: "In the world you have tribulation." Jn 16:33

At times it does seem like we are on the losing end. The disciples thought that too when Jesus told them that he "must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. Jesus spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him." Mark 8:31-32

Imagine Peter rebuking Jesus because the Lord told the disciples the truth of his mission. Before he would be glorified he would have to suffer. Jesus in turn rebuked Peter and told the disciples "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34

Suffering before glory. This is the lesson Jesus taught his disciples as they experienced his transfiguration on the mountain. Six days after Jesus made clear to them that he would suffer

and die 3 of the disciples saw Jesus in all his glory...his heavenly glory. What an experience it must have been.

The Gospel writer Mark tells us that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to a “high mountain” to be apart from the crowds for a time of refreshment. If you visit the Holy Land, guides may point to Mt. Tabor in the middle of the plain of Megiddo as the site of the Transfiguration of Jesus. It may be that the choice of Mt. Tabor was based on the mention of it in Psalm 89:12. However Mark says the Transfiguration happened near Caesarea Philippi which would point to Mt. Hermon as the location of this glorious event. Mt Hermon was over 9000 feet high.

To the ancient Hebrew mind, there was something mystical about mountaintops. Such places were associated with God’s dwelling place. Beyond the sky and the water was the throne of God. Remember the Law of God was given to Moses on top of Mt. Sinai.

Immediately following the unveiling of the idea of the Suffering Messiah by Jesus, follows the vision of the Transfiguration. Here we come face to face with an incident that is cloaked in deep mystery.

- We can only try to understand what happened on the mountain top
- We can only imagine what Peter and the others experienced that day

Peter a week earlier in a sudden burst of inspiration had hailed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ...only to discover to his horror that Jesus’ notion of what Messiah meant ran counter to everything he had always believed. Rather than involving immediate glory, it meant suffering, rejection and death...in a word, the cross.

Why should I suffer as a child of God?

- Do not be surprised about suffering I Peter 4:12
- Trials are common to believers I Corinthians 10:13
- They serve to purify our faith
- The Holy Spirit will rest upon us I Peter 4:14
- Suffering comes before glory

Peter and the disciples must have brooded on this improbable combination: Suffering/Messiah. How could this be? The whole thing sounded like a contradiction in terms. How could the crucified Jesus be the long awaited Messiah of the Scriptures.

Jesus takes 3 of his disciples, Peter, James and John up into the mountain where they experience the glory of Christ. While Jesus is there Luke says that the Lord begins to pray. Then Jesus appears in all of his heavenly glory.

- The Gospel of Matthew says Jesus clothes became white as light
- Luke says Jesus looked as if there had been a flash of lightning
- Mark says Jesus clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them
- There it was Jesus' glory – translucent whiteness of pure light dazzling as the sun
- This was a glimpse of Jesus 2nd coming

This reinforces for them Jesus identity, ministry and mission. Jesus is seen in a glorified state, involved in a three-way conversation with Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah were two of the greatest servants of God in the Old Testament.

- Moses representing the Law of God
- Elijah representing the Prophets of God
- Jesus received his heavenly visitors and speaks with them about his approaching death according to the Gospel of Luke 9:31

Luke says that the disciples are in a deep sleep at this moment but they awake in time to see this great sight. Of course, Peter is the one to speak and speaks about building shelters so they can remain on the mountain in all of this glory.

Also on top of that mountain the disciples heard the voice of God in the cloud. In Jewish Old Testament thought the presence of God is regularly connected with a cloud. The cloud, or "Shekinah" was the age-old symbol of the Divine Presence of God among his people.

- It was in the cloud that Moses saw God
- A cloud led God's people through the wilderness
- A cloud filled the Temple of God when King Solomon dedicated it
- Jesus was received into a cloud as he ascended into heaven

The cloud on the mountain of Transfiguration was a sign to the disciples that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. Every Jewish believer in Jesus' day would have understood this.

On the mountaintop, Peter experiences an overwhelming sense of what theologians call the *Mysterium Tremendum*.

Peter has a bright idea. “Let’s stay here and build some shelters.” It is a common reaction. Let’s stop and stay here awhile. Remember the TV add some years ago of friends sitting around a campfire. A clean, clear mountain stream rushing by. A skillet filled with fish. A tub filled with their favorite drink. And one of the friends says to the others, “Fellows, it doesn’t get any better than this!

We have all had those kinds of experiences. Everything is “just right”. It seems as though it simply cannot get any better. We have a good experience in our life and we want to hold on to it. We want to hold on to the moment. We want to hold on to the experience. We want to hold on to the feeling. We don’t want the setting or experience to end. But, we must come down off the mountain top. We can’t stay up there forever for we would never get back to doing the Lord’s work and living life with the tasks that must be completed.

It is tempting to try to make the church a safe haven where we might find seclusion from the storms of life. But we aren’t supposed to stay in the church to do the Lord’s work. We come to worship to get our spiritual batteries recharged, but then we are called to return to the fray. The vision, the experience, the moment moves on. And so must we. We live on the move. The Bible tells us that God is on the move, too. The Biblical God is a God on the move...not a God who is stationed in one place.

Moments of a high spiritual experience are vital and necessary to recharge us. I have attended certain church events where I felt like I was on the mountain top basking in the glory of God. These have been youth rallies especially at the worship services where you have thousands of young people praising God...I remember the Synod convention I attended back in the summer of ’07 and the opening service with communion was overwhelming as over 2000 fellow Lutheran joined to praise God and receive his body and blood. But I knew that those moments would not last forever. I knew that to get the Lord’s work done I would have to come down off the mountain. Sure, I wanted to stay basking in the glory of that spiritual high. Sure, I did not relish getting back into the battle with sin and the devil in the routine of daily life.

Don’t forget those moments; but don’t freeze them, either! Peter wanted to nail down the moment, to put the freeze on, to make a permanent structure to which he could return when his faith would be tried and tired. That is natural. We all need that. But we cannot stop in our spiritual journey and put up a frozen monument to a fading vision or past glory. God calls us forward into the future. He calls us down from the mountain to meet the problems of the marketplace.

One moment we are lifted high above all the common confusion of life; and the next moment we are thrust back into the everyday qualities of being human. It's like coming to church and being uplifted by an inspiring moment of worship only to return to your car in the parking lot and discover that the battery is dead. The world refuses to go away.

Ernest Hemingway once wrote about his experience as a young man in Paris: "If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a movable feast."

God is a moveable feast. That is what Peter forgot, for a moment. He forgot that by going down from the mountaintop, he was not leaving God behind. When we leave the sanctuary this morning, we are not leaving God behind. God goes with us. God is out there ahead of us. God is everywhere. Peter was to find that God awaited him on the downside of the mountain.

This is my beloved Son, listen to him! The voice came from the cloud. The Greek word "listen" here is a very strong word. It means, literally, "to obey and follow." And that's the way it is with any true encounter with God. Each encounter leaves us turned around and headed back down the mountain. God does not give us spiritual trips away from the real world but God puts us back into the thick of it. But we don't go back into the fray of life alone. We have the Word to sustain us. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Heaven can wait...but earth cannot. There are needs to be met at the foot of the mountain. We cannot stay on the mountaintop forever, for there are people who need us below in the marketplace. There is a world out there desperately in need of the truth of God's Word. People need to hear God's message of Law and Gospel, sin and grace, repentance and forgiveness.

Liturgy – the work of the people

Our Christian service is not what we do here in the sanctuary, but what we do in the world. Our word "liturgy" comes from a Greek word which means, literally, "the work of the people," and does not merely refer to what we do here in church, but what we do out in the world. We cannot stay in the church, forever, safely protected from the world around us.

God calls us into the real world outside the church...the world that is filled with squabbles, complaints, pettiness, and pain...but also he calls us into those grand and glorious opportunities to touch the lives of others in the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory

We are called to reflect the Lord's glory. Even in the midst of our trials, pains and difficulties of life we know that what is awaiting us is the glory of heaven. So, even, now in the midst of this crazy sin-filled world we show the Lord's glory to others. The Bible says: "And we with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.." II Corinthians 3:18

Special Counselor to the Dying

In her book on death and dying, Dr. Elizabeth Ross, tells the story of a woman who was a member of one hospital's maintenance crew. The woman spent her day cleaning floors, emptying wastebaskets, and tidying up. The hospital staff began to notice that each time she finished cleaning the room of a dying patient, that person was more content, happier and at peace. This woman was asked why this was. She said that she had known a lot of fear and tragedy in her life, as well as good times when other helped her know of God's love. She had been up on the mountain and down from the mountain. The worst time was when her 3 year old son was ill with pneumonia. She brought him to the public health clinic and he died in her arms while she waited her turn. All of this could have embittered her, but she said, "You see, the dying patients are just like old acquaintances to me, and I am not afraid to touch them, to talk with them or to offer them hope." The woman was promoted in the hospital and she became "Special Counselor to the Dying."

Aren't we all? We cannot stay on top of the mountain. There are lives to be touched down there in the valley. Go and touch them with the touch of Jesus' Word and love.