

Transfiguration – 2012

February 19, 2012

Mark 9:2-10

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 any more, 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. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

Thirty years ago I took a trip to the Holy Land with Brother John Hamilton and his wife, Virjama. I can't even remember how the trip came about or why I thought I needed to go, but it did and I went. I was a bit smitten with the idea I would walk where Jesus walked. Traveling to a different culture was eye-opening, but the rest seemed like a giant tourist trap. I felt like I had "American sucker" stamped on my head. Jesus ate here. Jesus slept here. Jesus prayed here. Jesus taught here. On the Mount of Olives there was a concrete impression of a footprint – the footprint of Jesus. "One American Dollar" could buy you a bottle of water from the Jordan River, a piece of carved olive wood from the Garden of Gethsemene, a drink from the well in Jericho, or a picture of the wailing wall.

It all seemed very strange to me, especially as we quickly drove by the aging Palestinian refugee camps – and visited settlements that looked more like prisons – only they were keeping people out, not in. I didn't know what a M-16 was until I went to Israel. So we followed the steps of Jesus, taking pictures of concrete shrines, buying imported trinkets, thinking we were so blessed to be in such a holy place. Anything Jesus taught seemed to be secondary to where he had been.

It just seems like sometimes we miss the point.

A few weeks ago I heard a preacher say that when people go to the Grand Canyon's South Rim they spend, on average, 17 minutes actually looking at the Grand Canyon and 3 hours in the gift shop. I had to check that out for myself, and sure enough the Chicago Tribune reported that, according to park surveys, the average time looking at the Grand Canyon is indeed 17 minutes. (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/travel/chi-981213onpgrandcanyonguide,0,5073024.story>)

I had to dig a little deeper to find out about the gift shops, but sure enough, the park surveys also reveal that folks spend 3 hours shopping in the stores.

(<http://www.luminous-landscape.com/columns/Artist%20in%20Business-2.shtml>)

The thing that makes that statistic even worse is the fact that in the midst of a wealth of native American artisans – virtually 100% of the items sold in the gift shops are imported.

Just think about that, seventeen minutes looking at one of the greatest wonders in our country and three hours looking at stuff you could buy at our local Cracker Barrel. Once again, we seem to be missing the point.

I can give another example, and since no one in our church is planning a wedding right now I think it is safe to share it. Here is usually how it goes down. Thousands of dollars are spent on flowers, dresses, bubbles and bobbles. Countless hours of shopping and stressing go into figuring out every detail. The average time spent taking pictures is 3 hours, when the actual wedding is about 15 minutes. Visitors come from miles around and the only way the bride and groom knows they were there are the reception photos or gift tags. I'm just saying that sometimes it seems like we miss the point.

In this strange story from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus goes up a mountain with Peter, James and John. His clothes become dazzling white. On this point Mark is very specific. Then Moses and Elijah show up and they are talking to Jesus in a great cloud. Then God speaks. "This is my son, my beloved, listen to Him!" Peter witnesses the whole thing and is ready to build the gift shop. In other words, he misses the point.

We can't give Peter too much grief though because we often miss the point. We just want to go to church and sing the songs we like to sing and do things the way we've always done them. We get distracted by little details – like mistakes in bulletins, the quality of the snacks, or the placement of furniture. We show up, sing, pray, write checks, do everything we think we're supposed to do, and even then we sometimes miss the point

And what is the point?

"Listen to him!"

This big, glorious, moment, was all just to make this point. By the time it was over there was no doubt that Jesus was authorized by God to speak God's truth. This moment was bigger than Moses on the Mountain getting those 10 commandments. This moment was bigger David slaying Goliath. This moment was bigger than Daniel in the Lion's Den. This moment was big – glorious – spectacular – but that wasn't the point.

"Listen to him."

People did listen to Jesus until he started talking about the cross. When he started talking about service and the cost of love, people started having their doubts. When he told folks that in order to follow him they had to pick up their cross and follow they were certain it didn't mean it – really..... When he was arrested and executed you can imagine that people had their doubts about anything he had to say. When it looked like Jesus didn't know what he was talking about – God said, "Listen."

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies. Turn the other cheek. Forgive. Serve. Heal. Welcome the stranger. Let oppressed go free. Give. Don't worry. Consider the lilies.

We listen to all kinds of folks – why not Jesus.

I can remember talking to a church person who said to me, "I don't care what Jesus had to say about it, this is what I believe!"

We want to build shrines, go shopping, take pictures...and God wants us to listen. And the kind of listening God is talking about has hands and feet. It is when we listen and act upon his words that God's glory breaks through.

When kids give up a weekend to have a mission experience we catch a glimpse of God's glory. When folks give up a Saturday to provide hospitality to a grieving family, God's love breaks through. When we offer aid to someone without any safety net through our NET fund, we catch a glimpse of God's glory. When we offer rides and sit with the homebound, God's light shines through. When we forgive when it would be easier to carry our anger, God is revealed to others.

I didn't see much of God's glory in the Holy Land. And if the statistics are true people miss it at the Grand Canyon, and at weddings. And if we don't listen, we won't see it here.

May we have ears to hear and may we give Jesus more than 17 minutes. Amen