

"What Do We See?"

2 Kings 2:1-12; Ps. 50:1-6; Mark 9:2-9

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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Transfiguration Sunday, February 22, 2009

Two familiar and famous stories frame today's celebration of the Transfiguration of Jesus. They are each given as "eye-witness" accounts of spectacular events which stretch the imagination and seem to go far beyond anything that we might have seen or experienced.

In the first story Elisha and Elijah are engaged in a bit of a "cat and mouse" game. They both know what is about to happen. For that matter, so do the other prophets in Bethel and Jericho. This transition of leadership and Elijah's bodily assumption into heaven are not meant to be private events. They are very public.

But still, the transition and the conferring of prophetic authority onto the shoulders of Elisha hinges on whether he sees what happens to Elijah.

We say "seeing is believing" but for all of these stories from the Bible we are depending on the sight of others who convey the events to us and also interpret them for us. To a certain extent that is fine and to be expected and relied upon. But there also comes a time when we want to see for ourselves and to interpret things based on our own experience of the presence of God in our lives.

When Peter and James and John were on the Mountain top with Jesus, who told them the other figures were Moses and Elijah? Did Jesus introduce them as Mr. Moses and Mr. Elijah? Did they wear name tags? Did they have their names printed in large Hebrew letters across the back of their robes like holy hockey players?

How did the disciples know who they were? Did they just receive insight at the time? And how well did that insight stand up to reality after they came down from the mountain?

Much has been made of the Transfiguration and its importance in the life of the church. It stands as the doorway to the season of Lent, a time of self-reflection, self-sacrifice, study and purposeful penance before the arrival of Easter and the celebration of the glorified and risen Christ.

Is this Transfiguration vision given to us to encourage us to "hang in there" even when things get very tough? (It wasn't enough to keep the disciples from forsaking Jesus and fleeing before his crucifixion).

Is it to show us God's solidarity with us through the good times and the bad and to remind us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and he could have chosen to return to glory with Moses and Elijah, but instead chose to come down off the mountain and journey alongside us through the darker valleys of life?

Is this vision of the Transfigured Jesus appearing with Moses and Elijah meant to seal in our hearts and minds the connection between the three? In other words, that Jesus is the continuation and the fulfillment of everything that the great Lawgiver, Moses, and the great voice of the prophets, Elijah, came to confer on us?

It is all of these things and more.

But one of the questions that I keep pondering is whether the disciples would have known anything about what was going on apart from their study of Scripture and religious education and their experience with Jesus.

We cannot get close to Jesus without drawing close to the Scriptures. Yes, there will be followers of Jesus who will model Christian principles in their words and their actions. They will help us to draw close. But sooner or later, we have to encounter Jesus in the Scriptures and decide for ourselves just who he is ... for us.

This is what the spirit of Reformation is all about: a personal encounter with the things we have seen and heard and received and a searching and honest quest to consider what it all means for us.

I want to know who Jesus is through honest engagement with the texts, searching study, intentional involvement in Christian community and through practicing what it means to be a disciple and a follower of Jesus.

I want the things we sing about at summer camp: "I've got the Joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart", "the peace that passes understanding", "the Love of Jesus". I want that "Blessed Assurance" and the "Faith of our Fathers and Mothers".

But along with these desires I have to be honest with myself. All this drawing close to Jesus won't change the facts on the ground. It won't get lost jobs back, it won't - in and of itself - fix a broken relationship. It won't provide the answer to the deep economic hole we've fallen into. It won't bring back a loved one who has died.

But, it will change us. It will hold up a mirror to us and force us to look at ourselves differently. It will challenge us to question our assumptions about what it means to be part of the body of Christ, the Church.

We have an investment here at Chapel Lane in people and programs, in a past and in a future. Are we making the spiritual payments on this

investment? Or are we just going through the motions? (These are Lenten questions!)

Are we leaning too much on the mercy and grace of God, trusting that God will just say, "Oh, it's ok"? Scripture reminds us that God is not mocked. It tells us that faith in God is not just a mental attitude, but it is also an action, a behavior and a way of life.

What do we see when we see the life of Chapel Lane and our involvement in it? Are we seeing the mountaintop or the valley or something in between?

Are we seeing the risen Christ who tells us that there will be trials and tribulations and desert places and struggles, but in spite of all we need not fear because he has overcome the world? Do we see the imprint of Christ in our life together?

This year, this Lent, the economy has gotten our attention as never before in recent memory. Will God get our attention too? Will we engage and act in ways that connect with our spiritual selves along with our secular selves?

Lent is a time for study, for conversation, for remembering our story and for letting it seep into our souls in a new way. I invite you to come away from whatever mountaintop memory has been the ideal for you, or perhaps has left you dissatisfied with the more ordinary aspects of discipleship, and embark on the journey of faith that is uniquely yours to take today.

Along the way you will find friends and co-laborers. You will discover new insights and new ways of looking at those ordinary saints around you and yourself as well. You will encounter Christ! You will learn through your own experience who he is for you.

Not a bad return on your investment in yourself and our life here at Chapel Lane. And these days, getting a good return on an investment isn't anything to sneeze at!