

“You Can See Forever from the Mountain Top!”

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March 6, 2011 – Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 24:12-18

Matthew 17:1-13

I love heights! The view from the Sears Tower or the Arch in St. Louis is spectacular. I feel like I can see forever. But I especially like to be on top of a mountain, preferably in the Rocky Mountains and, more specifically, the Rockies around Colorado Springs. The view is breath taking and the sense of awe is life giving. When we are on the mountain top we have an entirely fresh perspective. Today’s gospel reading takes us to a mountain top where, if we have eyes to see, we can see forever. Let’s start trekking!

Read **Matthew 17:1-13**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” ¹⁰And the disciples asked him, “Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹He replied, “Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; ¹²but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.

The Word of the Lord.....

*“Six days later.....” What was happening six days earlier? Why did Jesus choose this time to take his disciples to the mountain top? Remember the story of Jesus rebuking Peter and telling him, “**Get behind me, Satan!**” That’s the passage that immediately precedes the story of the transfiguration we just read.*

²¹**From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.**

Peter’s plans and hope for the future were challenged to the core. In no way could he grasp or compute the suffering and death of his Rabbi friend. It was beyond his mental and spiritual comprehension....it blew his mind.

²²**And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”** Peter, never one to hold his tongue, made it very clear that Jesus’ suffering and death was not going to happen on his watch. I have a slight feeling that he might have expected Jesus to be pleased with his display of loyalty to his Friend.....Hey, Jesus, we’ve got your back! Wow, he must have been shocked when Jesus.....**turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”**

Do you think we can be stumbling blocks to what Jesus desires to accomplish through us? Do we tend to follow in Peter’s sandals and set our minds on human things rather than what God desires? Of course we do. That’s the challenge of living in this world. We are prone to a human perspective rather than an eternal perspective.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians he warns the Christians in Philippi not to fall prey to those whose *“minds are set on earthy things.”* And then he reminds the Philippian Christians that, *“our citizenship is in heaven....”* (Philippians 3:19-20)

Jesus knows that his disciples just don’t get it and they need a *new perspective*. They needed a new set of eyes...a set of eyes that could discern a spiritual reality that could never be seen by physical sight. So he takes them to the mountain top knowing that they will be able to see “forever!”

Peter, James and John were not prepared for what happened on top of that mountain....they had never seen Jesus like that before! ²**And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.** ³**Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.** That freaked Peter, James and John out! We would have been freaked out, too! So, carpe diem Peter jumps into action to capture the moment. Let's build three dwellings....let's preserve this Kodak moment for all to remember. It's like Peter wanted to construct a "Jesus was Transfigured Here" historic marker, something like we might see beside the road...."George Washington Slept Here." He had no clue what was going on but he had to do something! Let's build something! His instinctive reaction was to get busy.... do something!

Like us, Peter becomes anxious when confronted with mystery, holiness and a radically different perspective of our Lord and Savior. Like Peter, our natural reaction is to work harder....accomplish something....be useful. And, like Peter, in our busyness we often miss spiritual opportunities to witness the reality of the real, living, life-changing Jesus Christ. It takes a mountain top experience to get us to stop and pay attention to the real Jesus.

It took a lot to get Peter to pay attention to the real Jesus. The change in Jesus' appearance and the brightness of his clothes and the presence of Moses and Elijah did not stop Peter....he just became more hyper. Individually, we fill our time with activities. In the church, we get hyper with this program and that program....if we did this, if we offered that, if we filled every night with activity then surely God will be pleased with us. *What does God want from us? More activity? More programs? More time spent in meetings, mission and ministries?*

⁵**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"** ⁶**When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.**

“...they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.” That’s not a bad place to be. Sometimes it takes coming to the end of confidence in self and at the end of our rope before we are able to be silent enough to “*listen to Jesus!*” I am convinced that Peter, James and John needed, more than anything, to be silent and “*listen to Jesus.*” At last Peter’s hyper-activity was slowed and he was silenced and that was God’s gift to him. It was this “on holy ground” experience that he took another step toward spiritual maturity. Jesus is more than you think he is and more than you are ever capable of comprehending. “***This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!***” Peter, listen to him! Peter stop you frantic striving to make things happen! Peter, Bob, Jim, Jan, Sue, Roy.....slow down and listen to him!

Only you can decide to slow down, change direction and listen to Jesus.

One of the few seasons in the life of the church that liturgically invites us to slow down, change direction and listen to Jesus is Lent. We begin with *Ash Wednesday* worship this coming Wednesday at 7:00 PM. I hope you will choose to change direction and come to Ash Wednesday worship. I say “change direction” because, for many, Ash Wednesday worship is *not* on your radar screen. Why would it be? It comes only once a year and we have our Wednesday evening routines. Perhaps, however, Ash Wednesday and other Lenten worship and quiet moments will become a mountain top transfiguration experience for you.

Lent is God’s invitation for all of us to change direction and come up to the mountain top where we can hear God say....

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

How will you change direction...how will you slow down...how will you listen to Jesus this Lent?

Amen