

SERIES: #come
#comingdown – Mark 1:21-28

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus who is Christ the Lord. Amen

Today, we conclude our look at the Gospel lessons for this time of year where we have seen the importance of movement in our faith lives. This weekend marks a time of transition for us in the movement of the church year. This is the, last weekend of the Epiphany season, with its emphasis on the revealing of Jesus, showing us who this child was that was born in the manger on Christmas.

During this season, we have seen Jesus as the healer, the preacher, the fulfiller of the law, the gatherer, as he called his disciples to follow him. We saw him as one who called not the righteous, but the sinner and in that calling people's lives were changed.

And today marks the final revelation of the babe born in the manger, as we see Jesus revealed as never before. For on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see what Jesus had been proclaiming about himself, we see for the first time his divine nature. We see Jesus revealed as the Son of God. Mark describes this transfiguration effect that Peter, James and John saw in Jesus in this way, "His clothes became radiant, intensely white as no one on earth could bleach them."

This was more than an exterior sign; it was his divinity shining through his humanity that the select friends of Jesus saw. This was for the disciples the assurance that Jesus was who He said He was: the Son of God, that all he had proclaimed about himself was indeed true. The transfiguration was a pit stop for Jesus. The heavenly father knowing the tight race his Son was running, flagged him into the pits right before he began his final lap, his final journey to Jerusalem where he would encounter the cross for sinful humanity, for you and me.

And as we end this season of Epiphany, we will begin the season of Lent with our Ash Wednesday services this week. We begin our Lenten pilgrimage with the assurance that we are indeed following the Son of God: no impostor, no pretender, but the Son of God who was revealed through this mountain top experience. But, do we truly see Him for who His is?

There was a man who went to his doctor and expressed the following concern: "Doc, I'm really worried. Every time I drink a cup of coffee, I feel a stabbing pain in my eye. Do you think it's serious?" To which the doctor replied, "No, try taking the spoon out of your cup first."

We may not have a spoon blinding us and causing pain in our eyes, but chances are, at times, we see things from a certain perspective, a certain way that may very well prevent us from seeing things more clearly. We all form certain opinions of others based on how we see them. Sometimes how we see them and our opinions of them can be mistaken. Or sometimes our perspective is simply blurred because of our sinfulness and our selfishness.

In today's gospel, Peter, James and John were all given a vision, a new way of seeing Jesus when he was transfigured before them. This changed their perspective of who Jesus was and gave them a new understanding. It was indeed a mountain top experience for them.

Those of you who have ever climbed to the top of a mountain or flown in an airplane know that the view "up above" is much different than "down below." I know whenever I've stood on top of a mountain on a clear day I've marveled at how I was able to see so far into the distance ahead. I've also been fascinated by looking out the airplane window at an infinite number of clouds below me. So too were Peter, James and John marveled by and fascinated with the transfiguration of Jesus.

I don't know if you noticed it, but if you read carefully Mark's description of the transfigured Jesus, it is strikingly similar to the description of the risen Christ in the New Testament resurrection accounts. Take into consideration verse nine of today's gospel where Jesus tells his disciples as they go back down the mountain not to tell anyone about the transfiguration until after he had risen from the dead; and we are given the impression that the transfiguration event is a preparation for the future; for the cross and His resurrection three days later. For when Jesus rises from the dead He proclaims victory for us over sin, death and the grave. In essence Jesus was telling them it would all make sense when He rose from the dead.

Sometimes it's not until much later in life that we come to see the purpose of the events of our lives and how they all fit together. It is then that we realize how God works through such events to prepare us for the future. Our mountain top experiences also prepare us for the future. When we, like Jesus and his disciples face our hardships and crosses, we can draw strength from the beauty and wonder of the mountain top perspective. As former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld once observed: "Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step: only (the one) who keeps (their) eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road."

Among the famous painters of the French impressionist era, Henri Matisse and August Renior were the closest of friends. When Renior's health failed and doctors forced him into confinement for the final decade of his life, Matisse visited him daily. Renior, almost paralyzed with arthritis, continued to paint at his easel in spite of his infirmities. One afternoon, Matisse watched his friend painting, fighting torturous pain with each movement and stroke of the brush. He finally blurted out, "August, why do you continue to paint when you are in such agony?" Renior never looked up. His eyes were fixed on the canvas with complete concentration. Then he spoke softly, "The beauty remains. The pain passes."

The beauty remains; the pain passes. These are profound words. In the transfiguration God assures us there is much more beyond waiting for us, much more within us that can emerge and be realized.

All of us need the vision of the mountaintop. All of us need transfiguration experiences, where our entire perspective is changed, the fog is gone, and we see more clearly. If we stop and reflect upon our lives, likely we've all had such transfiguration experiences just as Peter, James, and John. We too can probably identify with Peter in today's gospel, when he attempts to capture and prolong this transfiguration experience by attempting to make three dwellings for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses.

However we like Peter, James and John come to realize that we cannot live on the mountaintop forever. The valleys beckon us to come down and live our lives as servants with other people—just as Jesus did with Peter, James and John.

Jesus and his disciples, like Moses of old, descended from the mountain to the valleys of life to serve and give of themselves. The mountaintop had prepared them all for loving service to others. The same is true of us. It has been said that old people are not lonely because they have no one to share their burden but because they have only their own burden to bear.

An eighty-five-year-old woman was being interviewed on her birthday. "What advice do you have for other people your age," the reporter asked. "Well," said the woman, "at our age it is very important to keep using all our potential or it dries up. It is important to be with people and, if it is at all possible, to earn one's living through service. That's what keeps us alive and well." The reporter then said, "May I ask what exactly you do for a living at your age?" "I look after an old lady in my neighborhood," was her unexpected, delightful reply.

Loving service heals everyone—both those who receive it and those who give it.

If you will bear with me for a moment, I want to share an idea of mine with you...

There is a sense which we must still listen to Jesus as he guides us down from the mountain back to this journey of life. His speech is always the same, he tells us of the love the Father has for us then he challenges us to love one another in the same way.

There is a plan, a map, a direction to our lives as we listen to Christ. Peter wanted to stay on that mountain, to stay in the peace and the glory of that moment, but Jesus said no. They would come down from the mountain, back to the valley, back to the brokenness, back to the pain and heartache, back to the people, back to where ministry needs to be done.

Can you feel the sense of action, the movement, the going forward with Christ? We listen, then we act. We let our lifestyles show people the radiant face of one who knows Christ, who has praised Christ, who has worshiped and served him. One who has listened and followed him.

Let us act so that all might believe, all might be transformed, all might be made radiant, by the love of Christ.

Amen