

Matthew 17:1-9

**17** After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”

<sup>8</sup> When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

THE OPENING VERSE AND CHORUS OF A PRAISE SONG SAYS:  
“LORD, THE LIGHT OF YOUR LOVE IS SHINING, IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS, SHINING.

JESUS, LIGHT OF THE WORLD, SHINE UPON US, SET US FREE BY THE TRUTH YOU NOW BRING US, SHINE ON ME, SHINE ON ME.

SHINE, JESUS, SHINE, FILL THIS LAND WITH THE FATHER'S GLORY. BLAZE, SPIRIT, BLAZE, SET OUR HEARTS ON FIRE.

FLOW, RIVER, FLOW, FLOOD THE NATIONS WITH GRACE AND MERCY, SEND FORTH YOUR WORD, LORD, AND LET THERE BE LIGHT.”

THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF THE TRUST AND GLORY OF CHRIST OUR LORD, IS THE THEME OF THE GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING.

TODAY IS TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY, THE LAST DAY OF THE EPIPHANY SEASON, AND THUS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN IT AND THE SEASON OF LENT.

IT IS A DAY OF WHAT COULD BE CALLED HEAVENLY ORIGINATED SPECIAL EFFECTS, WITH SHINING LIGHTS AND DIVINE VOICES.

A BETTER THEOLOGICALLY ORIENTED EXPLANATION IS- THAT IT WAS THE DAY JESUS RECEIVED THE CONFIRMATION FROM HIS FATHER- THAT NOW WAS THE TIME FOR HIM TO HEAD TOWARDS JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS.

THE THREE DISCIPLES WHO ACCOMPANIED JESUS UP TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP ALSO RECEIVED A CONFIRMATION ABOUT JESUS BEYOND WHAT THEY EXPECTED.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THIS BETTER, WE NEED TO LOOK BACK TO MATTHEW CHAPTER 16.

IT IS THERE, PETER RESPONDED TO JESUS’ QUESTION: “WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

PETER, FILLED WITH SPIRITUAL INSIGHT PROCLAIMED: “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.”

THOSE WERE TITLES GIVEN TO GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT WHO WOULD DELIVER GOD'S PEOPLE AND NATION FROM FOREIGN OPPRESSORS, AND REESTABLISH THE KINGSHIP OF DAVID'S LINE.

IN SHORT, FOR THE JEWS OF THAT TIME CALLING JESUS THE MESSIAH OR CHRIST, AND THE SON OF GOD WAS UNDERSTOOD DIFFERENTLY THAT IT IS AMONG CHRISTIANS.

NONE OF THE DISCIPLES COMPREHENDED THE DIVINITY OF JESUS. AND YET, THEY BELIEVED HIM TO BE THE MESSIAH THE PROMISED KING, WHOM GOD CALLED HIS SON.

BUT THEY DID NOT GRASP THE LITERAL MEANING OF THOSE TITLES OR JESUS' FULL IDENTITY.

THERE ON THE MOUNTAIN, PETER'S EXPRESSION OF JOY AND DESIRE TO BUILD THREE STRUCTURES TO HONOR JESUS, MOSES, AND ELIJAH SUGGESTED JESUS WAS SEEN AS THEIR EQUAL.

CHRISTIANS KNOW THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS WAS MEANT TO SHOW HIS DIVINITY, AND THUS SUPERIORITY TO MOSES AND ELIJAH, TO THE LAW AND PROPHETS.

IT WAS IN ORDER TO REVEAL TO PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN THE TRUE MEANING OF THEIR VISION GOD THE FATHER DIRECTLY INTERVENED.

A CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THE WHOLE MOUNTAIN TOP, OBSCURING SIGHT BUT NOT SOUND. AND IT WAS WHAT THEY HEARD THAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT.

IT WAS FROM WITHIN THE CLOUD THAT HID THE DISCIPLE'S EYES FROM SEEING THE ALMIGHTY, THE VOICE OF GOD PROCLAIMED JESUS' IDENTITY TO THEM.

GOD TOLD THEM: "THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED, WITH WHOM I AM WELL-PLEASSED."

THE IMPLICATION WAS JESUS IS NOT AN ORDINARY SON OF GOD, IN THE WAY ISRAELI'S KINGS WERE SOMETIMES CALLED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

WHILE JESUS WAS, IN MANY WAYS, LIKE ONE OF THE DAVIDIC KINGS OF OLD, HE WAS ALSO GREATER THAN ANY OF THEM.

GOD PROCLAIMED JESUS' UNIQUE STATUS AS HIS BELOVED SON, AND AFFIRMED JESUS WAS ON THE RIGHT TRACK BY HEADING TO JERUSALEM.

THEN GOD COMMANDED THE DISCIPLES, SAYING "LISTEN TO HIM."

AS YOU MAY RECALL THEY OFTEN HAD TROUBLE REALLY HEARING AND ACCEPTING SOME THINGS JESUS SAID.

SO, GOD'S APPEARANCE IN THE MIDST OF THE CLOUD, AND HIS COMMAND TO THE THREE DISCIPLES- IS WHERE THIS STORY TAKES ON PERSONAL RELEVANCE FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY.

THE FIRST MESSAGE IS ABOUT CLOUDS. THEY CAN BE VERY WELCOME ON A HOT SUMMER'S DAY.

HOWEVER, ON COOLER DAYS, CLOUDS CAN MAKE THE DAY FEEL COLD AND DARK, AND STORM CLOUDS MAKE IT FEEL GLOOMY, AS WELL AS BRING BAD WEATHER.

IT IS THOSE KINDS OF CLOUDS WHICH CAN SYMBOLIZE A SENSE OF DREAD, GLOOMY FEELINGS, DIFFICULT TIMES, OR THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN.

CLOUDS OBSCURE OUR VISION, WE MIGHT SAY THE FUTURE SEEMS CLOUDY, MEANING IT IS UNCLEAR TO US.

THE GOSPEL PASSAGE IS ABOUT THE KIND OF CLOUDS THAT HIDE THINGS FROM US. AND YET IT IS A HOPEFUL CLOUD, NOT A DREADFUL ONE.

IN THE STORY, A CLOUD COVERED THE MOUNTAIN TOP- OVERSHADOWING THE DISCIPLES, AND HIDING THEIR EYES FROM SEEING GOD.

ALL IN ALL, IT WAS A FEARFUL EVENT, EVEN BEFORE THE DISCIPLES HEARD GOD SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THEM. BUT IT WAS WHAT THEY HEARD THAT MATTERED MORE THAN WHAT THEY COULD SEE.

WHAT THEY HEARD FROM GOD WERE WORDS OFFERING HOPE AND DIRECTION.

FURTHERMORE, FOR US, HEARING GOD WAS IN THE CLOUD IS A POSITIVE AND HOPEFUL THING.

IT REMINDS US THAT WHEN OUR LIVES OR FUTURE SEEMS "CLOUDY", BECAUSE WE DO NOT KNOW OR UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON, DO NOT FEAR FOR GOD IS IN THE CLOUD.

YES INDEED, THIS IS EMPHASIZED EVEN MORE SO BY JESUS WHO PROMISED TO BE WITH US ALWAYS.

THIS MEANS GOD IS WITH US - IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD, SUNNY DAYS, CLOUDY ONES, AND EVEN IN STORMY WEATHER.

WE CAN TAKE COMFORT KNOWING THE LORD IS PRESENT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, EVEN WHEN WE CANNOT SEE HIM WITH OUR PHYSICAL EYES.

YES, CLOUDS CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE, THEY CAN HINDER OUR PERSPECTIVE MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO SEE WHERE WE ARE OR WHERE WE ARE GOING.

BUT CLOUDS, ACTUAL ONES AND METAPHORICAL ONES, ARE NO HINDERANCE TO THE LORD WHO SEES US CLEARLY, AND SEES THROUGH ALL TYPES OF THE CLOUDS AS WELL.

ANOTHER THING ABOUT THE CLOUD IN THE GOSPEL STORY IS THAT IT WAS ACTUALLY THERE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE DISCIPLES, WHO WOULD HAVE DIED IF THEY SAW GOD THE FATHER'S HOLINESS DIRECTLY.

SIMILARLY, CLOUDS IN LIFE, AS IN THE SKY, ARE SOMETIMES THERE FOR OUR PROTECTION. THEY SHIELD US FROM SEEING TOO MANY THINGS AT ONCE.

THEY MAY ALSO OFFER A BUFFER BETWEEN US AND WHAT GOD IS NOT YET READY FOR US TO KNOW. IN THIS SENSE THEY ARE A BLESSING RATHER THAN AN OBSTACLE.

LET US TURN NOW TO THE SECOND MESSAGE THE STORY PROVIDES WHICH IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT.

IT INVOLVES GOD THE FATHER'S COMMAND TO HIS SON'S DISCIPLES: "LISTEN TO HIM."

THOSE WERE NOT IDLE WORDS, EVEN THOUGH WE THINK THEY STATE THE OBVIOUS. OF COURSE, ALL OF HIS FOLLOWERS SHOULD LISTEN TO JESUS.

HOWEVER, THE GOSPEL STORIES, RECORD TIMES, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE TRANSFIGURATION, WHEN THE DISCIPLES HEARD JESUS SPEAK, BUT DID NOT REALLY LISTEN TO HIS MESSAGE.

LET'S FACE IT LISTENING IS NOT ALWAYS EASY FOR HUMAN BEINGS.

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES THAT ILLUSTRATE WHY IT CAN BE HARD TO LISTEN TO OTHERS. THEY PRESENT TWO OF THE MOST BASIC REASONS WHY THIS IS THE CASE.

LISTENING CAN BE HARD BECAUSE SOMETIMES WE ARE REBELLIOUS OR STUBBORN, AND OTHER TIMES BORED.

THE FIRST STORY IS ABOUT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASS, WHERE THE TEACHER SENT ONE BOY TO SIT BY HIMSELF IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM.

HE WAS SENT THERE BECAUSE HIS BEHAVIOR SHOWED HE DID NOT WANT TO LISTEN TO THE TEACHER.

AFTER HE LEFT, ONE OF HIS CLASSMATES RAISED HER HAND, AND WHEN SHE WAS CALLED ONE SAID:

"I DO NOT WANT TO LISTEN EITHER, SO CAN I GO SIT IN THE BACK OF THE CLASS WITH HIM?"

THE SECOND STORY IS ABOUT A YOUNG BOY WHO ASKED HIS MOTHER IF SHE COULD REMEMBER WHAT WAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER SHE HAD EVER COUNTED TO AT ONE TIME.

SHE TOLD HIM THAT SHE COULD NOT RECALL, AND THEN ASKED HOW HIGH HAS HE COUNTED. THE BOY PROMPTLY SAID IT WAS: 5,372.

WHEN ASKED WHY HE STOPPED AT THAT PARTICULAR NUMBER, HE ANSWERED: "CHURCH WAS OVER."

THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOT ONLY WITH CHILDREN. TEENS AND ADULTS CAN FIND A LOT OF THINGS TO THINK ABOUT OR DISTRACT US FROM REALLY LISTENING TO THE LORD.

ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THIS IS-WE MOSTLY LIKE TO LISTEN TO GOD WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL, OR WHEN HE SEEMS TO BE TELLING US EXACTLY WHAT WE WISH TO HEAR.

HOWEVER, WHEN WE FEEL LIKE GOD IS NOT LISTENING TO US, OR IS CHALLENGING US IN WAYS WE DO NOT WISH TO EMBRACE, WE OFTEN FIND IS EASY TO TUNE HIM OUT.

THIS IS WHAT THE DISCIPLES OFTEN DID WHEN JESUS SPOKE ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

THOSE WORDS OF JESUS DID NOT FIT INTO THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS, NOR THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAY JESUS, AS THE MESSIAH, WOULD FULFILL GOD'S PROMISES.

YOU SEE, THEY LONGED FOR ONE KIND OF SALVATION, WHILE JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO BRING DIFFERENT KIND.

THE DISCIPLES AND OTHER JEWS PRAYED FOR FREEDOM FROM ROMAN OPPRESSION, AND A RETURN TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE AND DOMINANCE ON THE WORLD STAGE.

THEIR MINDS, IN A SENSE WERE SO COVERED BY CLOUDS OF THEIR OWN MAKING AND DESIRES- THEY COULD NOT CLEARLY HEAR JESUS, OR SEE THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S PLAN.

THEREFORE, THEY VIEWED THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE CROSS AS A TRAGIC DEFEAT, INSTEAD OF THE GLORIOUS TRIUMPH IT ACTUALLY WAS.

IF THEY HAD ONLY LISTENED TO JESUS, THEY MIGHT HAVE SAVED THEMSELVES FROM THE WORST OF THE FEAR, ANXIETY, DESPAIR, AND CONFUSION THEY SUFFERED.

BUT SCRIPTURE TELLS US THEY DID NOT REALLY HEAR OR UNDERSTAND HIS MESSAGE.

AFTER ALL THEY WERE ONLY HUMAN AND SOMETIMES EVEN WHEN THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS WILLING- OUR FLESH IS WEAK.

THIS IS REMINDS US WHY WE NEED THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE FORGIVENESS JESUS PROVIDES.

SIN, WE COULD SAY, CLOUDS BOTH OUR ABILITY TO HEAR AND TO OBEY THE WORD OF THE LORD.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE CLOUDS OF SINFULNESS ARE NO MATCH FOR CHRIST.

THEREFORE, OUR RESPONSE TO THIS TRUTH IS TO REPENT, AND TRY AGAIN TO REALLY LISTEN TO JESUS AND OBEY HIM.

LENT, WHICH BEGINS THIS COMING WEDNESDAY, OFFERS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO REAFFIRM OUR DESIRE AND COMMITMENT TO FOLLOWING JESUS MORE FAITHFULLY.

IN FACT, THE FIRST THING JESUS SAID TO THE THREE DISCIPLES AFTER THE CLOUD WAS LIFTED APPLIES TO US ALSO, FOR HE SAID "GET UP AND DO NOT BE AFRAID."

WE ALSO, EVEN AFTER CONFUSING AND FRIGHTENING EVENTS ARE CALLED TO TRUST IN THE LORD AND FOLLOW HIM.

LENT OFFERS US A TIME TO REFLECT ON OUR FEARS AND OUR FAITH, AND HOW WE CAN LISTEN MORE TO THE LORD DURING SUNNY AND STORMY CIRCUMSTANCES.

MAY THIS LENT BE A TIME FOR EACH OF US TO LEARN TO MOVE ON IN LIFE WITHOUT FEAR, BECAUSE WE TRUST THE LORD IS WITH US AND WILL GUIDE US.

TRULY, GOD IS PRESENT EVEN WHEN CLOUDS OF LIFE SURROUND US OR CAN BE FOUND WITHIN US.

THIS IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE GOD CAN SEE CLEARLY ALWAYS, AND CAN LEAD US EVEN WHEN WE CANNOT SEE VERY WELL.

LET US PRAY:

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