



©2022 Ginger Hertenstein
SERMON TITLE: The God Who Can Be Seen
SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:1-10
DATE: January 31, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Exodus 33:18-23. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Have you ever had a mountaintop experience where you felt like you never wanted to leave? You just felt God's presence or assurance or love. You knew God was there! This is not unusual in the Christian experience.

Remember from last week, six days prior, Peter had declared Jesus to be God's *Messiah*. But then Jesus told his stunned disciples that he would undergo great suffering, crucifixion, and death. Peter took Jesus aside and reprimanded him. This resulted in Jesus strongly rebuking Peter—and telling his disciples (and us!) that they (and we!) must deny ourselves and take up our cross, just like him.

Now he obviously did not mean we would physically die on a cross for following him—he was saying, though, that our devotion to him needed to be the top priority, even before our own wishes, desires, and personal agenda.

Needless to say, this is rather shocking, because we often think “my life is my own. I will live it on my terms.”

However, **with Jesus, a “Jesus” lifestyle is called for.**

We remember that the Christian lifestyle includes this closeness with Jesus; this walking our paths with him; the reality that we are never alone because Jesus is with us. Have you experienced that? Do you not pray for yourself and those you love; do you not seek his comfort and help when in trouble? Do you not read his words in the Bible and take them to heart? Are you not inspired at difficult times to seek Him—and seek people you know will lead you to greater faith in Him?

And, there's also the resurrection factor. No matter how bad it gets, Jesus brings to us “new life.” That is why we are here in church today. We need the HOPE and the COURAGE that Jesus offers.

Six days had passed since that conversation about “taking up the cross and following Jesus” had transpired. Jesus again spoke to them:

Jesus went on to say, “I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!” (Mk 9:1)

Jesus knew they did not understand his power, which was all wrapped up in his authority as the Son of God. He knew they were standing there looking at him as a man, a rabbi, their teacher, but it was hard for them—and it is hard for us—to really grasp who Jesus is. Here's what came next. READ Mk 9:2-10:

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials-- one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and only Jesus was with them. As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept it to themselves, but they often asked each other what he meant by “rising from the dead.”

The mountain was most likely Mt. Hermon because it is the nearest high mountain in the Caesarea Philippi area where Jesus and disciples were.¹ My friend Cindy lives there and took this picture from her home in the Galilee. You can still walk its 9,200 feet. How amazing to be able to walk where Jesus walked.

The transformation was completely spontaneous. The disciples did not ask to see God like Moses did; there was no bright flash of light as Paul experienced; nothing “poured down from heaven” like the fire when Elijah prayed that God would accept his sacrifice, to show the pagan Ba'al priests God is present and hears.

People long to see God to have these experiences. It is something within us that we desire to know our Creator.

Centuries earlier Moses prayed, “God, please let me see your unimaginable glory.” Moses wanted to see the God he had been serving. So God passed by Moses, but Moses could not look at God. Humans cannot see God and live. Being near God made

¹ Early theologians from the 4th century believe the transfiguration took place on Mt. Tabor. Others believe the location was Mt. Meron. No one knows for sure, nor did the biblical writers think it important to tell us. Perhaps that is so we realize it is not the place (so that we do not make a shrine of it), but the Person who was transfigured, showing He is the one who deserves our devotion.

Moses' face glow brightly, and he had to cover it with a veil (see Ex 34).

But it was different with Jesus. He was not glowing because God was near.

What the disciples saw was power emanating from Jesus himself who on his own suddenly illumined everything with this brilliant, luminous white radiance which originated from his body and shined brightly through his clothes. It did not fall on him from above; it did not spread to other people (Elijah, Moses, Peter, James, or John). Jesus became transfigured before the cloud came and God spoke from it.

Coming from within Jesus it saturated his whole being. Jesus did not glow because he asked God for anything. It was the majesty of the Son of God.

It was a revealing of who Jesus was before descending to earth. Remember what Philippians says, "Jesus gave up his divine privileges and took the humble position of a slave," when he born a human being (2:7). They saw the "before" Jesus. It terrified them all. That's when Peter attempted to take control.

Peter is a picture of us. He blurts out the first thing that comes to mind. You may not speak up but they all probably thought the same thing! "Let's *do something!* I know. Let's build tents and have a feast like we've done in the past."

We are headstrong. We "go with" whatever we can think of in the moment.

Often, we draw conclusions quickly; we look at the surface; rely on perceptions; make snap judgments; we impose our ideas of what should be done on others.

So in this most Holy sacred moment when the disciples should have been listening, watching, and waiting, they try to take charge. They try to determine the outcome. Is that your habit too?

So God spoke -- not toward Jesus, nor Moses and Elijah, but to the three headstrong disciples, who have their own agenda, as verbalized by Peter.

God directs their attention to what truly matters. God did not want them to miss the real message or the experience.

What truly matters to you? Do you draw conclusions based on perceptions or snap judgment or your own agenda? Resist that, if you want to hear the voice of God. If you are self-driven and controlling, you will miss the extraordinary.

The real message was Jesus' authority. Jesus IS the glory of God in human form. **Jesus makes it so we can see God and not die. That's Jesus' authority.**

Peter, James, and John were in the presence of God and they did not die.

Why is it important to see Jesus as authoritative Lord?

No human being can fill the gap between our heavenly Creator and ourselves. Timothy Keller says in *Jesus the King* that "many religions have temples (or tabernacles) with priests and sacrifices and rituals to transform your consciousness or take away your sin—to mediate the gap and protect human beings from the divine presence."² However, we must understand that **Jesus alone is the bridge to God.** When we walk with him, we are embraced by God.

That is gargantuan love.

Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:16-18 that this experience changed his life.

C. S. Lewis said,

"God selected one particular people and spent several centuries hammering into their heads the sort of God he was—that there was only one of Him and that He cared about right conduct. Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. . . . and since he was a Jew, that meant the Being outside the world, who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips."³

So God says, "Listen to Him!" Then, all that Moses and Elijah taught us will come alive. All the Scripture we are to follow, when Jesus is with us will pay off.

Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light" (Mt 11:29-30).

When you can see Jesus and you know that He is sent from God so you can see God, how does it go for you? You experience a God who dearly loves the One he sent to rescue you and this God dearly loves you, too.

AMEN

² Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 124.

³ From *Mere Christianity in A Year with C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 24.