

"REMOVING THE VEIL."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Text for the Sermon: Mark 9:2-13

Introduction.

Mountain top experiences are wonderful, aren't they? Most of us have had one or more moments that are just glorious. You can think of a time and a place where you were overwhelmed with happiness, joy, excitement. A honeymoon, a vacation, a success or accomplishment, a recognition, a victory, some rich blessing.

I suspect we are getting ready to have one next week when Phama and I meet our five sons in Key West for Todd's wedding to Emma from England. You know how mountain top experiences are, we can hardly wait for it to get here, the time seems to go so slow. But I also know that those eight days will be over in the blink of an eye and we will be back down here in the valley of regular, normal Lynden life again. While we are there we will probably try to figure out how we can build some tents to make the experience more permanent.

This morning we come to a mountain top experience called the Mt. of Transfiguration. Most likely this is Mt. Hermon which is very near Caesarea Philippi. Mt. Hermon is the very northern most point of Israel on the Syrian border and at 9,232 feet it's the highest point in Israel.

This strange event raises lots of questions, good questions that helps us dig into the text.

Why just these three disciples? Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Abraham or David? Why this vision? What's the point? Why yet again another command to silence? If He didn't want them to say a word until after the resurrection, then why show them now?

The transfiguration of Jesus, Mark 9:2-3.

The word transfigured is the translation of the word from which we get metamorphous, meaning to change or alter outward appearance, usually for the better.

In the case of Jesus, He was not transformed, as from one thing to another thing. He was transfigured, as if a veil was lifted and they had a glimpse of the real Jesus. The veil over His divinity, over His heavenly glory was lifted and they were permitted to see the visible image of His deity. The transformation was not of Jesus' nature but of Jesus' appearance.

Mark says "his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them." Matthew and Luke say His face shone like the sun. Similar to Moses' face on Mt. Sinai which shone as a reflection of being in the presence of God (Exodus 34:29, 35).

It was like snow, but not; like the sun, but not; like lightning, but not. Those things don't scare us, but something about Jesus' appearance terrified them.

Did they see Jesus as He is now in heaven? I don't think so. I think they saw only a glimpse, only as much as they could endure. Physical flesh cannot behold God in His absolute, infinite glory. On the mountain He was like the sun, in heaven He outshines ten thousand suns.

However muted this vision was, it was still marvelous beyond words. The glory of Jesus is something to behold. Whatever people think of Jesus, He is way more than they ever imagine.

And one day we will be partakers of that glory. We will recognize each other, but we will be changed and given a glorious body. Jesus shows us that that can happen with human flesh, for He is glorified in His flesh.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah, Mark 9:4.

What was the significance of their presence on the mountain? And why these two and not others like Abraham, Samuel, David, or Isaiah?

Moses and Elijah were the only two prophets of God who ascended the holy Mt. Sinai to meet with God. Moses received the Law there, Elijah heard the still small voice there.

They represent all those who suffered because of their obedience to the Father. And they represent the two kinds of believers on earth, those who die and will be resurrected; and those who will be alive and just taken up to heaven, as Elijah was.

But more significantly, Moses and Elijah represent the entire OT. Moses as the writer of the first five books of the Law and as the Law giver. Elijah as the first representative prophet, representing all the rest of the OT which is often referred to in the shorthand summary way as the Law and the Prophets.

All the Law and the Prophets speak of and point to Jesus. Remember on the Road to Emmaus on Easter afternoon when Jesus spoke to the two disciples:

Luke 24:25-27 "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Deuteronomy 17:6 says that on the testimony of two or three witnesses a thing is established. God sends three witnesses to testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Moses, Elijah, and God's own voice. Moses and Elijah testify that Jesus is the Christ, the one all the Law and the Prophets point to. And the Father testifies that Jesus is His beloved Son. That's why Jesus also took three witnesses who would testify that what they saw was true.

The response of Peter, Mark 9:5-6.

Peter seemed to want to make this wonderful mountain top moment last. Once again he was shortcutting and short circuiting the plan. He wanted victory before the battle.

But who wouldn't want to do this? After all as the Psalmist says, "In your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

A good Jew would know the Jewish hope that God would come and tabernacle with His people again, that God would once again make His dwelling with man as in the Temple. So building some tents was not as far off as it sounds. But Peter didn't yet understand that God had chosen a different kind of tent, that Jesus was God's tabernacle with us.

"The Word has become flesh and *dwelt* among us" (John 1:14). Dwelt or tabernacle with us. In Jesus God has pitched His tent among us.

Peter doesn't get the purpose of the vision. He missed that the purpose had to do with Christ's calling to suffer and die.

Second, he tried putting Moses and Elijah on the same level as Jesus. He didn't get that the One greater than Moses and Elijah is here. He had too low a view of Jesus.

Third, he foolishly wanted to build some earthly dwellings for men who already had heaven as their home and glory as their reward. He did not know what he was saying or doing.

But if we can say something good about Peter, it's this. He was right, it was very good to be there and good for him to recognize it. Nowhere on earth has there been a meeting like this. Not even in the greatest Synod or General Assembly or sacred gathering.

Here was God the Father, God the Son in His glory, God the Holy Spirit, Moses the great law giver and Elijah the great prophet who delivered Israel from Baal worship, here were Peter, James and John. Indeed, that was a very good place to be.

The sight of glory did not leave him unmoved, unchanged. He noticed and he was moved to respond. The vision may have lasted only a few minutes but it had a profound effect.

What would be the effect in our own hearts if we were to ponder for a few moments what it will be like when we see Jesus in all His heavenly majesty and splendor? And what will the effect be when we see not just Moses and Elijah but all the saints arrayed in heavenly glory? What will it be like to see ourselves sharing in that glory, when our perishable and mortal bodies put on imperishable immortality (I Corinthians 15:53-54).

Peter's heart is right, he knows a good thing when he sees it, to be with God is very good.

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

Psalm 84:1-2, 10 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
10 For *a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.*

Peter's joy and happiness at only a glimpse should bless us with a sense of how great will our joy and happiness be in eternity with our Lord in glory. We will no doubt be saying over and over and over again, "It is good to be here."

The declaration of the Father, Mark 9:7-8.

While the Son's veil is pulled back, a greater veil is given as the Father comes to speak. The cloud is the same shekinah cloud we read about in the OT where the presence of God falls on the mountain or on the Temple.

"This is my beloved Son, listen to Him." Moses and Elijah are excluded at this point. They are not equals with the Son of God. The last time we heard these words was at Jesus' baptism when they were spoken to Him, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In the past God spoke through the prophets, but now He is speaking through His Son, so now listen to Him. Listen to Him when He tells you the one thing you have the most trouble believing. Listen to Him when He tells you that the Messiah must suffer.

Coming down the mountain, Mark 9:9-13.

"Tell no one until after the resurrection." Glory is only understood after the resurrection. Right now it is obvious they don't get it. They didn't get the resurrection. They were questioning what it means? "You don't think He really means literally raising from the dead do you? To raise from the dead means He first must die, right? How can this be?"

They have questions about Elijah. Having just seen Elijah, they are confused. If Jesus is the Messiah, wasn't Elijah supposed to come before Him, not after Him, according to Malachi.

The religions leaders discounted Christ because there was no sign of Elijah. But they missed John the Baptist. Because he suffered they assumed he was not the one. This suffering thing continues to throw them off course.

Elijah had come and he too had suffered, just as the Son of Man would. Give up this notion of glory without suffering, or gain without pain, of heaven without a cross.

They and we must develop a better understanding of suffering and of the redemptive purposes of suffering. That's true for Jesus' suffering and that's true for our own suffering.

Application and conclusion.

Why this vision? And if they aren't supposed to say a word, why show them now?

Remember Peter's confession about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." We know he got the name correct, but not the content. Because right after that Jesus told His disciples the Son of Man must suffer many things and die, and Peter rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing.

What happens on the mountain is a divine confirmation by Moses, Elijah and the Father that Jesus was on the right path to the cross as all the OT predicts; and a divine assurance to the three disciples that the one who is about to suffer really is God. God can suffer and in fact will suffer and the Messiah really is a suffering servant.

Christ gave them this vision so that they would not be discouraged or offended by His weakness when He was tortured and crucified. They should never think that He was dragged away powerless to stop His enemies. Christ makes it clear to them that He died because He willingly

laid down His life, it was not taken from Him. He could have just as easily called down His glory and ten thousand legions of angels.

John 10:17-18 ... I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

It should be abundantly clear that Jesus is absolute immune from death, unless He voluntarily wills it and chooses it. Because Jesus is not powerless, His suffering is purposeful.

This vision is to remind us that when we feel weak, when we feel like those against us are far more than those for us, when everything seems to be going in the wrong direction, or getting worse and worse, or when it seems like God Himself is impotent to act, when faith and hope seem to be diminishing, the vision of the transfiguration is meant to give us a glimpse into reality, into what the future holds and who holds the future.

This vision was given to these three disciples to strengthen their faith for the trials and suffering ahead. This vision is given to all the saints in all times to strengthen our faith in the trials and sufferings ahead. This is the joy set before us so that we will persevere in enduring the cross. Our crucified Savior sits in glory at the right hand of the Father and He will come again in great glory and great power and until that day He is guarding and keeping the saints.

A number of you have shared how discouraged you are over some of Tuesday's election results. Scripture says the days are evil and we live in a wicked and adulterous generation. It doesn't matter what the world says about Jesus or what leaders or politicians think about Jesus. Listen to what God says about Jesus. "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him."

Listen to Jesus, lean on Jesus, find your hope, peace and rest in Jesus, abide in Him and He will abide in you. Seek Jesus. Urge your children and grandchildren to do the same. Be like Moses and Elijah, be a testimony and a witness pointing to Jesus. He will never fail us, He will never leave us or forsake us. When everything else in life fails us or disappoints us, when our money or health fail us, when our friends and family fail us, rest in the vision of Jesus' glory and in the words of the Father.

Suffering comes before glory, for Jesus and for us. If you want glory without suffering you are not following Jesus.

Bear patiently the days ahead in the confident assurance of Christ's coming, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life and the redemption of all the earth.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.