

Come and Go

Sterling UMC
February 19, 2012
Mark 9:2-9

Today we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday. Few other events in the New Testament are shrouded with as much mystery and misunderstanding as the Transfiguration. Three of the four Gospel writers include this story in their Gospels. What is it that they want us to see? Let's take a look at the disciple's dramatic encounter with the glorified Christ to see what it has to say to us today.

Can you imagine what it must have been like on the mountain of transfiguration? Jesus had called his three closet disciples to come with him and they climbed to the summit of a high mountain. Suddenly Jesus was transfigured before them. The word transfigure is taken from the same word we get the word metamorphosis, which means a physical change from the inside out. Jesus' appearance literally changed allowing what was inside to come out. Jesus revealed his true nature, his awesome power and glory to them. His face changed. It began to shine like the sun. And even his clothes looked different. They became so white that they dazzled them with their brilliance. There, Jesus stood before them in all of his majesty and glory. It must have been an incredibly awesome sight.

And then, there appeared two other men talking with Jesus. They were two great figures of the past, Moses and Elijah. Moses the law-giver and Elijah the great prophet were there before their very eyes talking with Jesus.

Peter did not know what to say. He was completely overwhelmed by the whole thing. He didn't know what to say, so he blurted out the first thing that came to his mind; "Lord it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three booths - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Peter's speech was interrupted by a bright cloud that descended upon them and enveloped them. Then they heard a voice from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Is it any wonder that they fell on their faces and were filled with fear? They were in the very presence of the living God. But Jesus came and lifted them up. "Do not be afraid," he said. And when they looked up they saw no one there but Jesus.

When it was all over, the disciples were left to ponder what it was that they had witnessed and to try to grasp what it had meant.

What does the Transfiguration mean? What does this story tell us? I believe it tells us two things. It tells us something about Jesus and it tells us something about ourselves.

First of all, what does it tell us about Jesus?

This mountain-top event confirms who Jesus is. It tells us that Jesus was indeed God's Son. If the sight of Jesus' glistening face and clothing had not been enough to convince the three disciples, the voice from heaven was the final proof. The Father spoke out of the overshadowing cloud, "This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him." They knew that God had broken through into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was more than just a great leader, a good example, a good influence, or a great

prophet. He was the Son of God.

But not only does this confirm Jesus as God's Son, it also confirms Christ as the Messiah. This great event took place six days after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Messiah. The apostles expected Christ to set up his messianic kingdom at Jerusalem immediately. But instead Jesus told them that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. All their hopes were shattered. And doubts must have plagued their minds as to whether he his mission - to fulfill God's law and the word's of God's prophets.

It is easy for us to get caught up in all of the theological meanings and implications of the transfiguration. But the true meaning of this great event goes beyond that. It has a practical message that we also need to hear. It tells us something about ourselves. I believe we can summarize the meaning of this miraculous moment for us with two words; come and go.

Peter, James, and John behold this immortal moment, and they do not want to leave. They wanted to stay on the mountain-top. They wanted to enshrine their experience in bricks and mortar. Peter was all set to build three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, so that he could prolong and preserve the experience.

The famous artist Raphael painted a magnificent picture of the transfiguration of Christ. The picture is divided into two parts. The upper part shows Christ and the disciples on the mountain-top. The face of Christ, a revelation of the love and beauty and goodness of God, shines like the sun, and the disciples around him are obviously caught in the wonder and the majesty of the moment.

But the lower part of the picture is a portrayal of human need. There is a sick boy, a worried father, and the mother on her knees in prayer. And you know that the sick boy will be healed, the worried father will find peace, and the mother's prayer will be answered.

Christ did not accept Peter's suggestion that he build booths on the mountain where they might stay. No! After the moving experience, Christ led them back down the mountain to a waiting crowd. They went from the mountain into a valley of great need. Immediately a man approached Jesus, fell on his knees and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water." And do you know what Jesus did? He reached out in his love and mercy and healed the boy.

Do you grasp the message for us here? To follow Christ means more than inspiring worship, more than just deep times of prayer, more than just the great spiritual experiences. It means that we must come down from the mountain and go back into the world spreading the light of the gospel among those who dwell in darkness. We are to be Christ to our neighbors. We gather here each and every week to honor and glorify our Lord, Jesus Christ. We come into his very presence and his presence comes to us. Jesus himself promised that, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst." We come and we sing, we pray, we hear His Word, we wait, we bask in his presence but we can't stay here. We all have to leave and go back to our homes, our jobs, our schools, our daily lives and routines and face the problems and the needs of this world.

The Lord God told the disciples on the mountain, "This is my Son, whom I love.

Listen to him.” Listen to him. And what does Christ say? Right before he took the three disciples up to the mountain he told them, “If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.”

In 1915, a 24 year-old pianist named Henry Barraclough, had been playing for a series of meetings in the mountains of North Carolina. On one particular night the preacher had been speaking about the glory of Christ. After the service this young pianist was so moved by this message that he sat down and penned several verses that we now all know and love, words that speak to us:

“Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe, Only His great, eternal love made my Savior go.”

Jesus calls us to follow him out of the “ivory palaces” that we seek to build and into a world of woe. Just as the apostles wanted to preserve their experience by remaining on the mountain and building a tabernacle to enshrine the glory of the Lord, so we too often want to cherish our comfortable pew, our class, or our prayer group to ourselves. But the Lord, the almighty Lord who rules the whole universe, will not let us. We must be careful not to turn our energies to the building of tabernacles. We dare not try to contain Jesus in our own little group or just for ourselves. Like Peter, James, and John, he sends us out into the world to encounter him in new ways, and to encounter the needs of others.

Jesus wants us to come to the mountain-top. He wants us to wait here for a while and experience his majesty and glory. We need to gather in his presence and to worship him. But he wants the mountain-top experiences to be the inspiration and the fuel to transform and transfigure our lives and to empower us to go into all the world, to take up our cross and follow him down the mountain and into the valley to spread the gospel message among those who dwell in darkness.

The Apostle Paul echoes this when he tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This morning we have gathered in the Lord’s presence. He has invited us to come into His presence through this time of worship. And as we open our hearts and lives to him he comes to fill us afresh with the his grace and love, and with the power of his Holy Spirit so that we might be renewed and refreshed. It would be easy for us to want to stay here and bask in his love and his glory but he doesn’t invite us to come and allow us to wait for nothing. He invites us to come, allows us to wait upon him, and then commands us to arise and go forth with a mission.

Walking the Christian walk always involves action. It is not enough to worship, to pray, to go on retreat, to practice holy habits, to receive this holy sacrament, to bask in the presence of the Lord. Raphael painted it. Henry Barraclough wrote about it. Jesus lived it. The transfigured Christ left the mountain to minister to the needs and the hurts of an ailing world. We can do nothing else but follow after his manner. Come and go.