

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 02/11/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Transfiguration Sunday**

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, February 11th

Mark 9:2-9

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Peter wants to take a selfie

The Transfiguration is the midpoint of the Gospel. Along with Peter's confession, this event becomes a pivot point in Jesus' ministry, shifting from teaching and healing to a journey to Jerusalem and His destiny with the cross. Located within a broader section of text bookended by the healing of a blind man (8:22-26 and 10:46-52), the reader cannot fail to see how Jesus' disciples remain blind. After Peter confesses Jesus as "*the Christ*" (the Messiah), he demonstrates his lack of understanding in his objection to Jesus' first prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection (8:27-33). Peter has another such moment high on the mountain of setting his mind on things of man and not on the things of God. There are relevant lessons here for our own discipleship journey.

Mark 9:2-9 Commentary

For context, the text follows Peter confessing Jesus as the Christ (8:27-30) and Jesus' first passion prediction, including the rebuke of Peter (8:31-33), and an instruction on the cost of discipleship (8:34-9:1). The section ends with Jesus saying, "*Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.*" (9:1) This teaching is also in a large section bookended by two blind healings. The first is the two-stage healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) and the second is the healing of blind Bartimaeus 10:46-52). These bookends suggest the disciples are initially like the first blind man – not seeing things clearly. Eventually, they will become like Bartimaeus – their blindness will be lifted, and they will accept the call to discipleship expressed in 8:34-9:1.

² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.

The timing, "*after six days,*" refers to 9:1. Perhaps Jesus is referring to Peter, James, and John as those not tasting death? Some argue the six days here is a parallel to the six days the cloud covered Mount Sinai when Moses ascended the mount in Exodus 24:16. The "*high mountain*" is another clear parallel. Jesus' inner circle of three disciples (Peter, James, and John) also parallel the three men (Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) who were invited to worship with Moses (Exodus 24:1) and who were later ordained as priests (Exodus 28:1). The sudden radiance of Jesus' clothing alludes to Daniel 7:9 and the Ancient of Days, God Himself, with "*clothing as white as snow.*" In the case of Moses, it was his face that shone (Exodus 34:29-30). On coming down from the mountain, Moses encountered faithless "disciples" (Exodus 32:7-8) as would Jesus (9:14-29)

⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

The presence of Moses and Elijah represents the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) and thus symbolize the coming of the Messianic Age (Malachi 4). This scene clearly portrays Jesus as the Messiah. Peter steps in it again. He requests to build three tents for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. He either wants to prolong the experience or perhaps memorialize the experience. Mark indicates Peter has messed up here and indicates how Peter was terrified and did not know what to say. What would Elijah or Moses want with a temporary, physical dwelling?

⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

The parallels to Moses on Mount Sinai continue. God speaks from out of a cloud (Exodus 24:16). This scene also parallels Jesus' baptism by John, only this time, the voice of God commands that they should *listen to Him* (see Deuteronomy 18:15).

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Jesus places a time limit on the Messianic secret – keep silent until after His death and resurrection.

Reflection and Application

The reader of Mark's Gospel to this point understands who Jesus is (beginning with 1:1). Yet Mark strongly and unflatteringly emphasizes how His disciples, with Peter as their spokesperson, just do not get it. The Gospel of Mark is as much about a group of bumbling, unbelieving disciples, albeit enthusiastic and persevering, being transformed by following Christ. Given Peter's direct influence on Mark, Peter himself is revealing his own shortcomings on his journey of discipleship. There is much hope here, for if Jesus could transform these bumbling disciples to who they would become, He can also do it with us!

If the Transfiguration happened today, Peter would probably have taken a selfie! This would be the modern equivalent of attempting to memorialize the event through the construction of dwellings. Jesus already rebuked Peter for what was revealed within his heart when he objected to Jesus' prediction of his death, and resurrection. Jesus' words, "*what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul*" (8:36) are being directed at Peter (and the other disciples). Peter is perhaps too wrapped up in the worldly benefits of his status as a disciple to fully understand at this point what his calling means.

Peter makes another error. In his desire to build three dwellings, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, Peter is putting all three on the same level. He confessed Christ a week earlier as the Messiah. He still does not fully understand the nature of Jesus who Mark revealed to us as the Son of God in 1:1.

On the one hand, this intimate mountain top experience shared only by Jesus' inner circle of disciples reveals a glimpse of the glory to come. The path to this glory lies not on the mountain top but down in the valleys. On the other hand, Peter's shortcomings plague all of us. We are also faced with the constant battle to overcome our worldly perspectives. This text challenges us to reflect on our own selfie-moments. Does what we memorialize in our lives, by selfies or any other means, glorify God? Or do we use God to glorify ourselves? Peter also made the mistake of placing the two prophets on the same level as Jesus. Who, or what else, have we placed on the same level as Christ in our lives?