

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
February 14, 2021

First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

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Mark 9:2-9

“This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mark 9:7 N.R.S.V.)

Kneeling In His Presence

Today is Valentine’s Day. I hope all of you husbands out there remembered that. If not, you might be in trouble. Some helpful soul put together this list to help husbands know if they are in trouble on Valentine’s Day.

1. Hallmark calls, offering discounts on apology cards.
2. The kids tell you that Mom, “went to bed early” . . . and locked the door while you were taking out the trash.
3. You wake up Monday morning with a florist’s ad stapled to your forehead. (Mark’s Musings, Dynamic Preaching, February 14, 2021, pg. 32)

So husbands and wives, I hope you remembered to do the right thing today.

Today’s sermon is not really about Valentine’s Day and the kind of romantic love that is usually associated with the day. But sometimes cards are sent to on Valentine’s Day to share other kinds of caring love. Let me suggest that Jesus Christ was God’s Valentine to us to show us that he loves us and cares for us. More on that later.

Our scripture begins with Jesus taking his three closest disciples and going up a mountain to pray with them. The disciples are confused because Jesus has just revealed to them that he is about to suffer and die. That is not what they signed on for when they agreed to follow him as his disciples. So sensing that they need a little more help, Jesus takes them up on the mountain with him.

There on the mountaintop, Jesus is transformed before them. His face and his clothes glow a startling white. Then Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest figures in Jewish history appear with Jesus. Then the voice of God speaks from a cloud saying, “This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly as they look around, Moses and Elijah are gone and they see only Jesus.

It is a lot for the disciples to take in. It is a lot for us to take in. Where do we start?

Let me start by saying that this is the moment that God is revealed to the disciples. This is the moment that they finally see Jesus for who he really is. Up to this point Jesus’ identity is somewhat of a secret. He is born a humble birth and grows up in a humble town. He calls his disciples and does some great miracles. After each miracle someone asks, “Who is this?” But

the answer seems illusive.

Finally, here on the mountain, the answer is given. Jesus is not merely a miracle worker. Jesus is not merely God's spokesman. Jesus is God. He shines so bright that the disciples are shading their eyes and looking away.

Peter, good old Peter, always has something to say. He blurts out, "Let us build three shelters one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah." I have heard a number of ideas on why Peter would say such a thing. But the simplest explanation is that he was afraid. He is so scared that he is babbling. I imagine that they all fell to their knees as well. Being on your knees in God's presence is always good.

Now I want to pause and reflect for just a moment on that fear. Fear is not something we usually associate with Jesus. We have made him into such a meek and mild figure - who could possibly be afraid of him? Yet, when Jesus came to the disciple walking on the sea, they were afraid. When he appeared to them after his resurrection, they were afraid. And here when he is transformed in glory in their presence, they are afraid.

Fear is a natural reaction to something that is unexpected and overwhelming. The fact that the disciples were afraid, tells us that Jesus was something that the disciples were not expecting.

One of the reasons that Jesus had to come and reveal God to us is because God is always so much more than what we are expecting. When human beings try to come up with a concept of God on their own, they always end up with an idol, instead of God. One of the mistakes that people have made time and again is to imagine that God is simply human virtue taken to its highest level. But God is always more than that.

What is revealed to the disciples on the mountaintop is the sheer otherness of God. No wonder they were afraid.

I have said this before, but it bears repeating. Christianity is a revealed religion. We can't ever get to God on our own. We can't get to God through human imagination, or human intellect, or human exploration. Christ had to come and reveal God to us.

That is incredibly good news for us. Because we keep getting off track. We keep getting caught up in the worship of false gods and idols. We need Jesus to come and meet with us, to reveal all over again the true God to us.

The book of Hebrews tells us that in former times God spoke to his people through the prophets. But in Jesus Christ he came to speak to us face to face. So there on the mountain, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus. But then in the midst of Christ's transformation, they disappear and only Jesus is there. Get it! And the voice of God speaks out of a cloud and says, "This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him." Get it!

The good news is that God refuses to stay penned up in heaven far away. God refuses to be obscure. God keeps coming down to us. God keeps speaking to us. God keeps revealing

himself to us.

Every once and awhile I will hear someone say something like, “What can you say about God. God is so mystical, so mysterious, there just isn’t much we can say about God.”

Fortunately for us, God refuses to leave it at that. God is very resourceful at coming to us, at revealing himself to us, at speaking to us.

God reveals himself to us in scripture and preaching. God reveals himself to us most fully in Jesus Christ. But even then God does not stop. In the Old Testament God spoke through the mouths of enemy kings. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. God spoke to Balaam through his donkey. God even speaks to us through a meal, through communion. Communion proclaims to us the Lord’s death until he comes.

As people we often complain that we are not sure what God wants us to do. We need more data. We need more information. But is that really true? Or is it a case that God speaks and we are not listening? After Jesus’ transformation the voice of God says, “This is my son, the Beloved, listen to him!” Are we listening? Or are we making excuses.

I said before that Jesus is God’s Valentine to us. Jesus reveals God to us. God comes to us. Unveils himself before us. Makes himself known to us. Refuses to be quiet about how things stand between us and God. God reveals his love for us.

Wil Willimon points out that the whole point of a Valentine’s Day card is to make the love known. Buying a card or making a card for someone else doesn’t make it. Sending the card without signing it doesn’t make it. The whole point is to sign the card and to present it, to make the love known. The point is to show your love.

So maybe that is the big take away from our scripture today. God wants us to know about him and his love for us. So God keeps finding ways to come meet with us.

No, Jesus has not appeared before me in dazzling white on top of the mountain. I have never heard God speak out of a burning bush or out of the mouth of a donkey. Yet, God has spoken to me through scripture, through sermons, through the voice of a friend, and through the Holy Spirit in my heart, and through various circumstances.

God is not trying to keep either his love or his will a secret. God wants us to know. And God is very resourceful in finding ways to talk to us. But always and always, we come back to Jesus as the fullest revelation of God.

Again I ask, if you are not hearing from God, is it because God is not speaking or because he is not saying what you want to hear? Out of the cloud the voice of God speaks once again, “This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him.”

Amen.