

**+ Mark 9:2-9 + Follow Jesus to the Mountaintop +
+ Last Sunday after the Epiphany: The Transfiguration of Our Lord + 22 February 2009 +**

This morning we're going to a mountaintop. You won't actually have to leave your seats, but our Guide, Jesus, will be taking us there. Why follow him up there? Well, he's leading us there to get us ready, to get us prepared, because we have a much longer, much more difficult journey ahead. With a glimpse of his divine glory and the thunderous sound of his Father's approval, Jesus will prepare us for the 40-day journey through the dark valleys of Lent. That journey will take us to another hill—a hill that looks like a skull and a place where Jesus' glory will be hidden, though he will accomplish greater things there. Jesus is also taking us up this mountain to prepare us for the long, difficult journey of following him to eternal glory—a journey before all of us who are his through faith in him..

So let's head up the mountain with the Lord. We're not alone, because he brings his three closest disciples—Peter, James and John. Jesus has been teaching them for about a week, since he announced ***"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."*** Jesus has been preparing them for the journey too. So **FOLLOW JESUS TO THE MOUNTAINTOP** and find out what happens. **Read Mark 9:2-9.**

It was late in Jesus' ministry. The time was coming soon for him to return to Jerusalem to suffer and die, but before that was going to happen, Jesus took his three disciples up a high mountain to prepare them for the big event ahead and to spend some time in prayer. The disciples were rather sleepy, but that quickly changed when Jesus was ***"transfigured"*** before their very eyes. Before he had looked like any ordinary human being, but now he was transformed to reveal his divine glory. Matthew tells us, ***"His face shone like the sun..."*** Mark tells us, ***"His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."*** This glory didn't come from the sunshine behind him, but it came from within him. Jesus was not only truly human, but true God. With his suffering and death ahead, the disciples needed to be reminded of that.

Mark tells us, ***"And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus."*** There standing with Jesus were two of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. Moses had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. He had served as the giver of God's holy Law and the proclaimer of his loving promises. Elijah had been the instrument through which the Lord brought thousands back to God at a time when it seemed all was lost. Elijah had also been taken into heaven body and soul without death. Both had come for one purpose—to speak with Jesus, ***"...about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."*** From the unique vantage point of eternal life, these two great prophets of old discussed Jesus' coming suffering, death and resurrection.

Moses and Elijah had also appeared with Jesus to help him prepare these disciples for what lay ahead. By their appearance they testified that Jesus had come to fulfill what they had foretold and proclaimed, not only with his holy life, but with suffering and death to come. They had come to help the disciples look ahead to the cross, where Christ would not appear so glorious, but bloody, battered, and dying.

In the midst of this discussion, Mark tells us that Peter without thinking exclaimed, ***"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*** Peter was so frightened he didn't know what he was saying. We can't blame Peter, because if we were in his sandals, we would probably think the same way. Who wouldn't want to preserve that thrilling experience? There was greater glory to come, however, and God himself had one more important lesson for them.

At that moment, ***"a cloud appeared and enveloped them and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'"*** In this cloud of glory, God himself not only strengthened his Son for the difficult journey ahead, but also prepared the disciples to follow Jesus. He stated three basic facts—Jesus is indeed my Son and therefore the true God. I love him and approve of what he is about to do. Finally, listen to what he has to say. He is proclaiming the truth, even if you don't want to hear it.

Just as suddenly as that cloud enveloped them, it disappeared. Mark tells us, ***"...When they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."*** All that glory that had caused them terror was gone. It was time to come down from the mountain. On the way down, Jesus commanded his disciples ***"not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead."*** It seems a rather strange command, but a long, dark road to death lay ahead for Jesus. The time would soon come when they could share what they had experienced. The final journey to the cross and the empty tomb had begun.

In the past couple months, we have followed Jesus from his conception in a virgin's womb to his birth in a lowly stable to his blessed invasion of our private little worlds of uncertainty. We have followed Jesus and have seen him conquer the demonic forces of Satan. We have seen Jesus heal every kind of disease, while showing compassionate care for each and every soul. We have seen Jesus make the unclean clean with his gracious power. In little ways, we have seen his glory. As we have followed Jesus from Advent to Christmas through the season of

Epiphany, we have come to know him as the only voice worth following. Amidst all the craziness and corruption and uncertainty around us—all of which threaten to overwhelm us, we have heard Jesus speak peace into our hearts and we have followed him.

So we follow Jesus to the mountaintop where he prepares us with his disciples for the journey of suffering and sorrow ahead. He displays his glory to remind us that he is indeed the true God. He is, indeed, in control of all things, whether it's how and when he will suffer and die and rise again or how he will get you through today and tomorrow. Jesus doesn't use that display of glory to terrify us with his holy radiance. His holy Law that condemns us for our sins does that enough. No, Jesus reveals his glory to prepare us for the journey ahead—a journey that will take us to the hill where his glory will be hidden, where he will endure God's holy wrath in our place.

You see, our journey of following Jesus now takes us to the cross. With his disciples, we follow him down the mountain to the dark valleys below. We follow him as he goes before us to suffer great anguish and pain, humiliation and death. We follow Jesus as he goes before us not to save himself, but to save us from our sins. We follow him as he ascends Calvary, where he will accomplish more glorious things than all the dazzling glory on the mountaintop. There on Calvary, though his glory is hidden behind blood and bruises and death, there Jesus is truly glorified for us when he cries out, ***"It is finished!"*** We recall the words we heard the holy God speak on the mount of glory, ***"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"***

On that lowly hill, we will listen to the Son of God, who will be insulted and abandoned for us. There on Calvary we will listen to the one voice worth following and we will know that God's love for his Son is now ours, because our Savior went to the cross for us. In the crucified Christ, we have certainty. In him, we have peace and forgiveness. In him and in his death, we have life.

On the mountaintop Jesus prepares us for that journey to the cross, but he also prepares us for the journey ahead of every one of us. You see, we follow a Savior who goes to bear the cross to save us. As his followers, we need to realize that we too will suffer and have crosses to bear for his sake. We have seen his glory in his transfiguration and his hidden glory on the cross, but Jesus doesn't promise glory in this life to those who follow him. No, Jesus used that glimpse of glory to prepare us for the hard days ahead.

We live in a world that demands a glorious God, who will give us the good life if we follow him. We live in a world that puts self on a pedestal and heaps insults on Christ Crucified. We have sinful natures that threaten to betray us to the enemy at every opportunity. We have the specter of death that threatens to rob us of the gift of life. All around us we see anything, but glory. We see fleeting accomplishments and temporary fixes. We see fear and uncertainty and worry on a scale unseen in generations. We see that stuff is just stuff and can all be lost with one bad day in the market or one failed company or one failed marriage. We realize this world apart from Christ is truly a desert dream. So we need Jesus to prepare us for the difficult journey of following him to another mountain, a mountain only accessible through Calvary, a mountain to which our eyes lift heavenward every day.

The ancient prophet Isaiah described that mountain 700 years before Christ—and what a sight it will be! ***"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."***

On the mountaintop, Jesus had revealed his glory to remind us that he was and is true God in control of all things, even when so much in this life threatens to overwhelm us before we make it to that heavenly mountain. Through the appearance of Moses and Elijah, Jesus confirmed that he would fulfill what had been foretold. He would and does fulfill every one of those promises of God's love and provides the rock-solid, unchanging certainty we all need to get through this life to the next.

When we see change and decay all around us, when other helpers fail and comforts flee, by that glimpse of glory, Jesus reminds us that a day will come when we will behold him in his glory. Remember his journey ended with an empty tomb. Because his tomb is empty, ours will be too and one day we who are in Christ will enjoy eternal glory in heaven. There will be no death there, no tears, no disgrace, no decay, no failure, only life and peace and joy in the presence of our glorious Savior Jesus Christ. So let's follow the only Voice worth following. Don't listen to all those voices of uncertainty, but listen to God's beloved Son. He reveals his glory for you. He goes to the cross for you. He will bring you home to eternal glory too. We follow. Amen.