

Homily for Transfiguration, 2021

Mark 9:2-9

'A glimpse of glory'

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TEXT – Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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INTRODUCTION (232)

Today, we're on the mountain with Jesus.

The ***mountain***.

Throughout history mountains have been closely connected to religion and spirituality.

Mountains have been seen as, in some sense, the place where heaven meets earth,

Where God or the gods meet human beings.

And before modern people write this off as some sort of primitive thinking,

We should consider why it is that, still today,
people sense something almost magical about mountains,
And are drawn up into them.

Why, for example, do so many people still have this drive to conquer Mt
Everest,
The highest mountain peak in the world?

Those ventures are sometimes talked about in almost transcendent terms,
The human spirit conquering this ultimate challenge.

There's something about the **mountain** that takes us up out of the everyday,
That speaks to us of permanence and power,

And as we look back down from the mountain top,
We are given a different perspective on life,
that feels to some,
nearly **super-human**.

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In the Bible too,

Mountains play a big role.

Abraham and Isaac on Mt Moriah

Moses on Mt Sinai,

Elijah at Mt Carmel,

And many more.

Jesus too,
Used mountains in his ministry,

Perhaps most memorably in this account of the Mount of Transfiguration.

So today,
let's journey with Jesus,

Up the mountain,
To see what happens **on** the mountain,
As well as going **back down** the mountain.

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UP THE MOUNTAIN (610)

The text begins,

'Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.'

So, notice right at the start of this text that Jesus is doing something very deliberate here.

He's taking these disciples **away** from the crowds,
Away from the demands of people and their needs,

Up into the **mountain** where they can be apart, alone,
Where they can receive something very special.

To be sure Jesus calls his disciples then and now to be **with** people,
To be serving others in his name,

But there's also something here about the need to **withdraw** with Jesus at times,

To following him into the deserted place,

So as to encounter God,
and have him reveal himself to you.

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There's a sense in which this is what we do as we gather for worship.

Christians are called to be in the world,
Serving others,
Mixing with those outside the Christian community,

And yet we are also called to withdraw with Jesus,

To listen to him,

To have God reveal himself to us in his glory,

So that we can share in that glory,

And be transformed to live our lives in the world.

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Up the mountain...

If you go back and read Exodus,
It's hard to miss the connections in our text with Moses and Mt Sinai.

There too,
there's a six-day interval,

And there too,
Moses takes three close associates up the mountain,

Where they encounter the glory of God,
In a cloud,
And hear the voice of God,

You can't miss the parallels.

And yet there is also something radically different,

Which we'll come to in a few moments.

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It's curious isn't it,

That Jesus takes just these three disciples with him *up the mountain*.

On the one hand we can think of it in everyday terms,

If the 12 Apostles are Jesus' main "committee,"

Then Peter, James and John are the "executive", you could say.

So, they need extra meetings.

There's also the Old Testament teaching of a need for two or three witnesses to establish truth.

But I wonder whether it's also worth considering another possible application here to us?

We are about to hear again of an extraordinary spiritual experience these three are given on the mountain.

And we'll see how it serves to encourage them in their faith.

We could think to ourselves,

“That’s all well and good for them”,

Or even in our time we could think,

“it’s all well and good for others who may have had special experiences in the Christian life,

But I haven’t,

What about me?”

Well,

It’s worth bearing in mind that there were 9 Apostles who got left behind,

Who,

in Jesus’ wisdom,

were not let in on this experience.

They weren’t any less Apostles because of it,

They weren’t any less disciples,

any less loved by God.

If we look longingly on the experiences or gifts God has given to brothers or sisters,

We do well to remember, that’s just how God works,

In his wisdom,

He gives gifts to some and not others,

Perhaps reveals himself in extraordinary ways to some and not others.

These three, by the way,

Peter, James and John,

Are the three who go with Jesus when he prays in **agony** in Gethsemane later on,
Which is not so desirable.

And of course, we know how the Holy Week journey went for Peter.

So, their special revelation here is no guarantee of comfort and ease going forward,

In fact, it may be precisely the opposite.

So first,
we go **up the mountain** with Jesus.

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ON THE MOUNTAIN (670)

But the real action happens of course,

On the mountain.

A **transfiguration**,
a metamorphosis, we could say,
involving dazzling brightness.

An appearance of two holy men of God from centuries before,
Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus.

A voice from a mysterious cloud,

A voice which points to Jesus as the Father's dearly loved Son,
To whom they are called to listen,

To whom **we** are called to listen.

And in between a terrified Peter blurting out the first thing that came to his mind,

The suggestion to build three booths,
Three little tabernacles,

Three little shrines, perhaps we could say,
to somehow capture the majesty of the moment,

Or to protect them from the glory of God?

What are we to make of all this that happens *on the mountain*?

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Well let's think of it in connection again with Moses on Mt Sinai.

As I said,
At first it seems like this is "Moses the sequel".

A new Moses,
And there's some truth to that.

But what's more significant is what's *different*,
That's the real point.

You may remember from Exodus that when Moses encountered the glory of God,
This spectacular shining light,
This nearly tangible manifestation of the Lord's presence,

When Moses encountered this,
his face would shine as well when he came back down to a lesser degree,

so he would wear a veil,

he was *reflecting* this glory,

But if this is a new Moses,

There's something very strange,

Because Jesus isn't *reflecting* any glorious light,

The light of this glory shines from ***within*** him.

If Moses was like the moon,

Jesus is the sun.

This revelation shows those disciples,

And it shows us,

That this Jesus is...

Not just another prophet like Moses and Elijah,

Not just another holy man,

Not just a human being who is ***harnessing*** divine power in his miracles and healing,

But he is the very Son of God in human flesh,

The holiness and purity and brilliant light and unimaginable glory of God in heaven,

Is present now,

In this man,

In this Jesus.

You know when you're trying to keep a room dark during the day,
for a baby to sleep or a shift worker.

You have block-out blinds, maybe.

And if you move that blind just a fraction,
Just a centimetre,

The light from outside it bursts in and fills the room.

Something like this happens on that mountain with Jesus.

As the Son of God takes on a human nature he veils his true glory,

But here for these few brief moments for just a few chosen disciples,

The "blockout blinds" are peeled back just a fraction,

And there's no mistaking who he is.

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That's why Peter's suggestion,

Is not completely wrong.

He realises there is something of heaven meeting earth here,
An encounter with the living God,

And he knows that in the past when this happened God commanded them to
build a tabernacle as a place to be in God's presence and receive his blessing.

The problem with Peter's suggestion though,
Is, I think, two-fold.

First, that he suggests three of these rather than one.

God's voice from the cloud makes very clear that's on the wrong track,

Listen to Him – Jesus,
Not them – Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

*...when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but **only** **Jesus**.*

Jesus is the one through whom God speaks his final word to us.

But problem number two,
Is that there is no need for a tabernacle,
For new little temple or shrine,

Because Jesus is the new temple himself,
In his body,
He is the new place of God's presence,

Not just near him,
Around him,
In him.

He is the one in whom God's presence and glory now resides,

And as the new temple,

This means he is also the place of sacrifice,
whereby sinners like Peter, James and John,

And sinners like you and me,

Can encounter this same glory and live,
And even share in it.

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DOWN THE MOUNTAIN (530)

As important as it is to go up the mountain with Jesus,

As important as it is to see what happen on the mountain to Jesus,

It's most important to see why Jesus also needs to go **down** the mountain,

And why true disciples need to follow him on that path.

Did you notice that after the description of such a spectacular, extraordinary event,

The last word in our text,
Is to do with death.

'As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.'

The mount of Transfiguration has given the disciples a glimpse of the glory of who Jesus is,

And the glory of where he is heading.

It's like a sneak-preview of his resurrection,
His ascension,
his coming again in glory.

But it's only a glimpse,
It's only a foretaste,

And the pattern of God's kingdom is suffering before glory,
The cross before the crown.

So Jesus needs to come down the mountain,

Because he's come to give his life,
By dying on a cross.

And this is good news for us.

Because it's only on the cross,

Where this holy and glorious one,
Makes it finally possible for us to share in that holiness, that purity,
That glory.

Because on the cross,

This glorious one,
Will enter into our shame.

On the cross,

He who shone with dazzling light,
Entered into our darkness.

On the cross he who heard that affirming voice from the cloud,

will cry out: 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me?'

and hear only silence.

But he did all that,
He suffered all that,

All for you,

So that you and me,

Frightened sinners who harbour darkness in our hearts,

Could be brought into the glorious light of his life,
His forgiveness,
His love.

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And so as his disciples,

We follow him not just up into and through the mountain top experiences of
our Christian life,

But we follow him on the way of the cross,
Through suffering,

Knowing that he is with us,
Leading us to a glorious future.

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Along that journey we gather here with him in worship,

Which the book of Hebrews describes as coming to '*Mount Zion*' (Heb 12).

Where by the power of the Holy Spirit working through his Word,

that light still '*...shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the
glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,*'

as we heard from our second reading today.

And as we gather here,
That heavenly glory is still hidden for us in the body of Jesus,

and we now receive it in a still more hidden way, in, with and under the bread
and wine of the Lord's supper.

And as we 'behold this glory, and are transformed into the same image form one degree of glory to another...',

This heavenly light is reflected in your lives for others to see.

Jesus said: *'Let you light so shine before others, So that they see your good deeds, and glorify your Father who is in heaven'*. Matt 5:16.

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CONCLUSION

Today on the festival of Transfiguration of our Lord,

Our text takes us up the mountain,

To see what happened on the mountain,

Before coming back down the mountain.

'How good Lord to be here!'

In the name of Jesus, Amen.