

“A Grander View”

His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. Sunlight poured from his face. His clothes were filled with light. This is my son, marked by my love, focus of my delight. Listen to him.

-Matthew 17:2 and 5 MSG

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Video Clip - As we begin please watch the following video - it moves quick so I ask you to pay close attention to what you see.

Intro: When you look at the people that surround your daily life, what do you see? Sons and daughters trying to figure out what it means to be strong or what real beauty looks like? An aging parent or spouse losing their capacity to remember? Students? Workers? Colleagues? Neighbors? When you look in the eyes of a stranger, if you look in the eyes of a stranger, what do you see? The sales clerk at Kohls, or your server at your favorite restaurant, what do you see? A single parent barely getting by financially? A young adult being the parent and head of household to her brothers and mom? Tattoos? Scars? Piercings? A criminal record. A way of life different than yours? When you look at the faces in this room what do you see? Joy? Sorrow? Judgement? Gladness? Frustration? And finally, when you look at our world today, what do you see? Heroes? Villians? A world of people hiding behind mask after mask?

Is that all there is? Is what we see all there is? What if there is more?
What if Jesus has more to show us - a greater vision, a grander view?

Today, we share a powerful and personal moment in the life of Jesus and his three closest disciples. Known as The transfiguration, it is the moment Jesus' appearance is changed from his earthy state to a heavenly one. You'll hear more about that later.

With only a few days before the beginning of Lent, this is a good weekend to consider what it is we see when we look at Jesus; when we consider his life, what he taught, and whether or not we see God's intended glory and truth, or simply see what we want to see.

Prayer - Speak to us Holy Spirit. Help us to get ourselves out of the way that we would see, hear and feel your very presence and truth. AMEN

Message

Jesus had been with the disciples for three years. They had traveled many a miles together, walked many a dusty roads, witnessed many a miracles, and heard many a teachings. They saw with their own eyes what Jesus was about, how he treated people, taught people, changed people, challenged people, and loved people.

AND YET they still struggled to answer Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15) They still wrestled to grasp the kind of suffering and

death Jesus told them he had to endure. (Matthew 16:21) They could not see beyond what they were looking at to comprehend God's grander view made manifest in Jesus. They saw what they wanted to see.

I ask you church, are we any different? Do we see beyond what we are looking at? Beyond the categories and boxes we put things and people in? Beyond the labels we so easily attach to define one another or keep others in their place? Beyond any number of political, religious, spiritual, racial, mental, sexual, or mental issues that scare us, challenge us, or make us uncomfortable? Perhaps we are not so different after all, for we often see what we want to see, and fail to see beyond what we are looking at.

That is why we need the transfiguration moment today as much as those early followers. Jesus knew what waited for him and his followers. He knew they had not yet grasped the bigger picture of who he was, why he walked among them, and what he wanted for them after he was no longer physically with them. To help, Jesus decides to take Peter, James and John on a little hike to the mountain. Mount Hermon was 14 miles from Caesarea Philippi, where they had been teaching and healing. It stood at an impressive 9,400 feet in elevation; 11,000 feet above the Jordan Valley.

Now that's what this Wyoming girl calls a hike! The the kind that takes a couple days to even get to where you start. The kind of that inevitably leaves a lasting impression, revealing something beyond what your eyes can see. The kind that shows your heart and soul the bigger picture.

I invite you to open yourself to the telling of this moment, according to the gospel of Matthew 17:1-8, reading from The Message.

READ TEXT

To begin to understand the power and depth of this text I ask you to do two things: First, put yourself, as much as you can, in Jesus' place. Second, look for and listen to what the text reveals about what God has given us.

If you were Jesus, why did you go there? Why take Peter, James and John? Some of our answer comes from the gospel of Luke 9, where we read the parallel of this event. There we read that by this time, Jesus was on the way to the Cross (9:51). Meaning, he had "turned his face to Jerusalem..." Again and again he told his disciples what was to come - his betrayal, arrest, and execution and how hard it would be.

So imagine for a moment, you are in the initial steps of the biggest, most breathtaking yet horrific journey of your life, and the people closest to you don't fully understand the weight of what you are facing or what you are about to endure. I think I would want them to come with me and get away for a time of sharing, remembering, reflection and prayer. And that's what Jesus did. I think Jesus did this at some level for his disciples and for himself, because he needed the support of his friends. He needed them to see the bigger truth of his identity and authority.

He also needed God in a way we may never fully comprehend. He needed to make absolutely sure, it was God's will for him to continue to Jerusalem. This was not the first time Jesus took time to get away, pray and fill his tank with the assurance of God. Now more than ever, he had to know with every ounce of his being that God would be with him every step of the way. It didn't hurt in this case, that Moses and Elijah showed up as well. Moses the greatest of all the law-givers and Elijah, he greatest of all the prophets. It was as if the great figures in Israel's history came to Jesus, as he was setting out on the last and greatest adventure into the unknown, and told him to go on.

Part Two

The second part of all this is I asked you to look for and listen to what this event reveals about God's grander view and how we are to live into it. On the slopes of Mt. Hermon, the disciples see the glory of the Lord Jesus like never before. They hear God speaking truth over Jesus, claiming him as God's beloved son, in whom God delights. But more importantly, they hear God say, "listen to him." It is important to note that the Greek word used here is not your casual, "hey you might want to hear what he has to say." It is a direct command from God. Much like at his baptism, this is the moment, Jesus' identity and authority are fully recognized.

This moment held power to open the eyes of these three disciples. To help them see beyond what was right in front of them.

Depending on the translation, the phrase “behold, look” is used three times in eight verses. Anytime a phrase is repeated in a short amount of verses, we need to pay attention and in this case the words are literally telling us to pay attention! Behold, look! Look beyond what you see! Behold, look! The grander view of God’s glory is before you. The greater truth beyond the limitations of our humanness.

God was giving the disciples the bigger picture to hold on to through the coming struggle and shame. The view from the top which was a view of triumph through the humiliation and a view of the crown beyond the Cross.

The experience on Mount Hermon gave the disciples what they needed to keep going even when they didn’t understand. Even when their fear and uncertainty, when all was said and done, they would remember what they saw that day, and it would give a new understanding of what Jesus taught them and modeled for them. It would give them clarity to love the way Jesus loved even others chose not to, and passion to go about life in a way that brought hope, peace, comfort and joy to others even when what they saw said otherwise. It would give them vision to create the kind of community Jesus showed them was possible regardless of what their eyes were seeing around them. The transfiguration gave them the realization and truth to see the glory of Jesus and the big picture of God’s love.

The same truth God has for us when we look beyond what we see. When we look beyond opposing thought and opinion and find common ground. When we look beyond the labels, categories, and issues and see the actual person. When we look beyond anger, judgement and prejudice and see the gift of other. When we look beyond disputes and divisive action and see the need for one another. When we look beyond perceptions, assumptions, and limitations and see God's grace, goodness, and glory. When we are willing to go up *that* mountain, and see such God intended - God designed glory, we may very well fall on our face in fear and trembling as well - for such glory is a sight to behold.

Conclusion

Lent begins in a few days - it is a season for followers of Jesus to reflect on their spiritual walk, take inventory of their faith, and surrender that which keeps them from fully experiencing the abundance of Jesus' sacrifice. We cannot do that dear church if we do not recognize God's grander view for us - as individuals, as family, as a church, as community, as people sharing life on this planet together. We cannot fully experience the glory of God if we do not look beyond our assumptions, beyond our ego, our agenda, our criticism, our fear and our shame and see vulnerability, connection and the common ground found in Jesus. Jesus, who stands with his hand on our shoulders saying, "Do not be afraid."

I pray that as we come to the table today, we will recognize and confess where we fall short. I pray we will let go of our need as Christians to be right at the expense of hurting others. I pray we are willing to offer and receive forgiveness. I pray we will see beyond what we are looking at.

May it be so.

Resources Consulted

Homileticonline.com

William Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series, The Gospel of Matthew Vol. 2