

Glory!

September 30, 2018

Mark 9:2 – 13, Psalm 50:1-6

The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights

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*To hear this sermon as preached in worship, please visit
<https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/sermon09-30-2018.mp3>*

Well, it's official – this is “wedding season”. Maybe you've gone to one or two already this fall. If it seems like more and more people are getting married at this time of year, you're right. Nine of the top ten wedding dates in 2018 are in September or October (yesterday was #4, by the way). If I was a part of your wedding, you'll know that I have a standard fee for conducting the ceremony: I ask for a photo of the three of us for the “wall of fame” in my study.

Wedding pictures. What a tradition. You may have been in some, and I'm sure you've seen a bunch. There are some pretty outlandish ones being taken these days...



As I contemplate the photos of so many of you that line my study, I ask myself, “Why do we take so many pictures at our weddings?” Surely the reason can't be simply to remember the fact that we got married. There are a hundred reminders of that every day. In addition, have you ever met someone who had forgotten that they got married? I don't think that's the purpose. There has to be more to it than simply remembering the event. Why do we get ourselves all gussied up and stand in front of the cameras for a very long time on what are often incredibly hot days, smiling as if we are as cool as cucumbers who aren't worried about whether the DJ will pronounce the names correctly or how we're going to feed 239 of our best friends?

Here's my theory: I think we stand up there and take the

photos because we want to somehow “mark” the day. We want to remember that it is a special day. But not just the day - we want to acknowledge our hopes and our dreams. We want to remember, when the dishes are piling up in the sink and the kids are screaming and the power goes out and the snow needs to be shoveled and the dog messed the carpet (*again!*) that when we started this adventure, we had some incredibly high hopes and we were surrounded by some amazing people – friends and relatives who had gone to great expense and trouble just to be there with us and for us on this incredible day. I think we take photos at these formal times so that we can remember not only how we looked, but all that we have hoped and dreamed.



¹I think that’s why Peter tries to get the Lord to allow him to set up some tents on the mountain. You know, there are a lot of reasons to love Peter in the scripture, but today’s reading is one of my favorites. Jesus has invited Peter, James, and John to come with him for an incredible experience, and Peter is overawed. I love the fact that just after recording Peter’s request to set up a few tents, the author of Mark says, “He did not know what to say...” It’s a clear acknowledgement that sometimes, Peter just can’t help himself. He knows he’s out of his league, but he just can’t shut up. I know how he feels...

He just wants it to last a little longer. Clearly, neither Jesus, nor Moses, nor Elijah needs any kind of extra shelter...but Peter just wants to stay there. “It’s so good – to be in the presence of the Lord, and to see these figures from the past, representing the Law and the Prophets – WOW! Don’t let it end, Jesus! I know that sooner or later you’re going to start talking about dying again, and we’re going to have to leave...but let’s not rush, huh?”

You can’t blame him. Peter is awash in the light; basking in the heavenly voice, overwhelmed by the moment. After all, he and the other disciples have just witnessed a *Christophany*; that is, a physical manifestation or revelation of Jesus’ true nature.

¹ *The Transfiguration of The Christ*, Earl Mott (contemporary)

Only six days prior to this, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ. Here, the Divine voice, along with the presence of Moses and Elijah, confirms what Peter has named. He sees the light; he loves the light; and he wants to stay there. You can't blame him for that.

But unfortunately for Peter, the moment does not last, and the vision fades, and it's just them and Jesus, coming down the mountain. As they do so, Jesus tells them what he's told just about everyone else in the past nine chapters of this Gospel: "Don't say anything about this." We've heard this talk of the "messianic secret" before, and it appears to be the Lord's way of saying to Peter and to the rest of us – "Look, I know you are in love with the idea of me being the Messiah, but you don't really get it yet. And whatever you do, don't try to tell this story until you know how it ends. When you really 'get it', you'll be able to tell it well. But for now, mum's the word." What is interesting to me at this point is that this is the final time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus tells people to keep his identity a secret. He is entering an increasingly public phase of his ministry and preparing for his death. There are to be no more secrets in the days ahead.



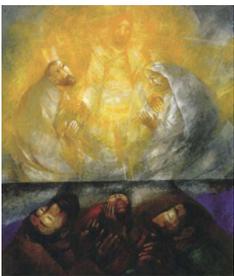
²As they come down the mountain, the disciples raise questions about the role of Elijah. Most of the rabbis at that time taught that when the Messiah finally came, he would be unmistakable in part because God would send Elijah to earth to announce the Messiah's coming. According to these teachers, one day Elijah would stand on the mountains of Israel, weeping at the desolation he saw. Then in a voice that would be heard from one end of the earth to the other, he would cry out "Peace comes to the world!" On the second day, he would cry out to all creation, "Good comes to the world!" And on the third day he would cry "Yshua (salvation) comes to the world!" And then Elijah would come and make things right so that the Messiah would come into a kingdom that has been properly prepared.³

² *Messiah's Entry Into Jerusalem*, Siegmund Forst (1965)

³ Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: Mark* (Westminster, 1956), p. 218.

Now remember that the twelve had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, and now here they see Elijah – and so they ask Jesus, is it going to be like that? And Jesus says, “No – not exactly. Elijah has already come” – a reference to the role of John the Baptist in announcing the ministry and work of Jesus. Jesus continues by saying, essentially, “You know, they didn’t get John’s ministry, they sure as shooting won’t understand me.” The world and the culture were limited in what they believed and could understand about God – and anyone who imposed those limits on John and on Jesus was unable to see God’s working in John’s and in Jesus’ lives.

Jesus, though, uses this event – we call it “the transfiguration” to teach his followers to remove that kind of limitation. Peter, James, and John had literally “seen the light”. They were different for having been in that place, even if they couldn’t fully realize it. Jesus allowed them to see him, and themselves, and each other in a different light – and they never, ever forgot it.



⁴Have you “seen the light”? What I mean is, have you ever been made acutely aware of who you are, where you are, and what that means?

Try this. Please, folks, don’t say anything out loud here. But think with me...

Think of a time when you were made aware of your own sinfulness. A time when you saw, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you were not who you wanted to be, or thought you were, or wanted someone else to believe that you were – a time when you were broken by this kind of awareness.

It may be been the day that you realized you were addicted.

Or the day that you took credit for work that was not yours, and were caught in it.

⁴ *The Transfiguration*, Sieger Köder

Perhaps it was when you were caught having an affair, or the shame you felt when you raised your hand to your child. It may be, for someone in this room, an awareness of shame that has come upon you in light of the national conversation regarding the #metoo movement.

Look, I don't know exactly when it was for most of you, but I'm betting that I don't have to convince you that you've had days where you realized that you've blown it. Do you remember that day? That pain? That shame?

As odd as it may sound, that was the light of Christ shining in your life. It illuminated a part of your world that had been dark, revealing a truth that you'd been hiding from others and perhaps yourself for a long time.

Stay in that pain for a moment.

Now, I want you to remember a time when you experienced great grace. A sense of your life being something that you did not deserve – a gift that came to you and you knew it was not the result of your own charm, wittiness, or rakish good looks.

Maybe it was the time he told you he loved you, or the birth of a child or grandchild.

It could be that time she stuck with you after you both knew you'd screwed up.

Maybe it was the day you heard about an amazing scholarship, or saw that relative who had written you off for dead, or somehow felt accepted in spite of your brokenness.

Can you remember a day like that?

That, too is light – coming from outside of you and revealing truth by illuminating the reality of your heart. You have seen the light – no less than the apostles did on the mount of transfiguration. I know you have.

This passage records the church's commemoration of the time when Jesus' face was set ablaze by the presence of the holy on top of the mountain. It reminds disciples – then and now - of how Moses' face was radiant following his conversations with the Lord.

Our witnesses to this event did not produce that light. They did not invent it or manufacture it or manipulate it. They simply stayed in it. They allowed it to change them. The light shone on them, and they stood in the light.

If I'm right about your best day and your worst day, you know something about standing in the light, too. So let me ask you, what happens when you stand in the light? Can you be changed?



What I really want to know is this: what if you were able to live in the deep awareness of the light of God penetrating your life – both your deepest sin and greatest brokenness **and** your ultimate joy and amazement at the undeserved grace that God has put in your life? What if you walked around every day convinced that you were terribly flawed, a great sinner in need of a great saving while at the same time you were absolutely sure that you were receiving some unmerited favor, some great gift that you did not deserve but clearly enjoy?

What if you had the self-awareness every day to say, and to believe, that “I am a great sinner whose life has been marked by grave misjudgments and boneheaded mistakes. And I am also a child of God whose life is filled with blessing that does not originate in me, and whose sin and mistakes cannot define.”

If you or I had the presence of mind to live like that, well, we'd be living like the transfiguration wasn't a one-and-done kind of deal.

Listen: if you are sure that you've been broken by sin, then how in the world will you judge your neighbor? What

makes you any better than that person you're ready to throw under the bus? We both know the answer to that question.

Again: if you are convinced that God's grace has been brought into your life, and that you are aware of the power of God's life, light, and peace – how will you hold that in, and think it only applies to you?

Oh, that the church might be full of those who are so grateful for what they've received that they are sold out for others! That we might be so defined by gratitude and so overwhelmed by the grace that we've received that we have no option but to extend that graciousness, that hospitality, to others.

My prayer for this day is that God will reveal to each of us who we are, and where we are. That we will claim that identity and dwell in it. And that the love of God might flow freely in and through us in ways that allow our neighbors to see the grace and forgiveness of Christ, whom we love and serve by loving and serving those amongst whom he has placed us. Thanks be to God for the light that has not stopped shining! Amen.