

February 14, 2020

“It Is Good for Us to Be Here”

Transfiguration Sunday-Mark 9:2-9

Pastor Katie Hambrick

As a child, I was always the one that got in trouble for asking too many questions in Sunday school. One Sunday in 1997, at three years of age, I gave my Sunday school teachers such a run for their money that they told my mom there was something different about me, and not in a good way.

I have always wanted to wrestle with hard scriptures and topics. I remember in third grade when the Left Behind series became really popular, and if you don't know what I am referring to, the left behind series is a book series that takes the book of revelation and applies it to modern times. So when it became really popular, I heard all of these adults debating if it was an accurate portrayal of scripture, and no one seemed to know the answer. So I decided to read both for myself to determine if it was or not. I do not remember what my third grade self determined, but the point is that I have never been afraid to wrestle with weird and complex texts...

It's that childlike faith of being able to debate yet still accept what is beyond reason. And I have always loved the exploration of that tension.

Then I got to this Sunday's scripture,
And I truly did not want to preach on it.
The transfiguration is a weird story.
You have Jesus with Moses and Elijah,
you've got Peter talking when he shouldn't,
And the voice of God coming through the clouds.

The story is an absolute mess of complexity to me. Where was I even going to begin with this, How does one explain the transfiguration...

Yes, I hear my young pastor ego in the idea that I should come here with answers. That Dan and I have all the answers Instead of embracing what all people of faith must embrace the not

knowing, The not being able to explain fully. Or the inability to give concrete answers sometimes.

It was when I started to brainstorm this with Dan, he asked me what was the good news in this story that I was able to think about what was the good news, and that good news is the mystery of the Divinity. The mystery of God.

See, we know from scriptures that Moses and Elijah are two of the major prophets. They both served God faithfully, and were representations of the promises God made with the Hebrews, yet both were rejected and mistreated by their people. So Peter, James, John, and the Jewish readers would have understood the representation made by these two appearing with Jesus.

In fact, they would also have remembered Moses has his own transfiguration experience in Exodus 34, when Moses asks the Lord to show him his glory. The scripture says that when Moses came down from the mountain after talking with the Lord directly and while holding the ten commandments that his skin was glowing so bright that the Israelites were afraid of him. Only his brother Aaron would approach him, and we are even told that he had to wear a veil for the rest of his days.

In today's scripture, we see that is what is happening to Jesus. Jesus is being transfigured into this glowing being, clothed in white, and talking with two of the greatest prophets in Jewish history who whenever they are present, the Jewish people knew that the Lord was near. And he is doing so, right in front of some of the disciples-

To which Peter, with his always amazing timing, calls out to Jesus in the middle of this beautiful moment and says, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here," which seems like Peter's way of saying, "uh hey Jesus, yeah, not completely sure what is happening here, but I know this is an important and powerful moment that I get to witness."

Then, we are told that from a cloud, the voice of God spoke saying "This is my son, the beloved; listen to him!" And after God says this, suddenly Moses and Elijah are gone, so it is just the disciples with Jesus.

The truth is that I do not think we are meant to fully understand what is going on here,

or what the transfiguration is. The scripture says that even the disciples, who spent almost every hour of every day with Jesus, were afraid and unsure of what was happening.

But, they knew enough to know that they had just witnessed a divine moment, a moment in which Jesus' full divinity had been revealed right in front of their very eyes. Which Jesus follows up with telling them that they are not to tell anyone what they witnessed until after the son of man had risen from the dead.

Even in the scripture to follow, they do not really asked questions about what they witnessed-

Because the beauty of this moment in scripture is the mystery of it.

I think one of the easiest and hardest things for humans is to be able to sit in the uncomfortableness of things we cannot explain.

The transfiguration story is one of those things, just as Jesus rising from the grave- we are unable to explain with our human reason. We cannot explain it, and sometimes cannot even fully comprehend it- and the beauty is that we do not have to.

Faith is- "the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen" as the author of Hebrews describes. And a lot of time, scripture calls us to embrace mystery- the things we do not understand or can't explain. Faith means that we do not have to fully understand what is happening to Jesus here. It is described to us as his full divinity is being revealed and realized.

The transfiguration story is a moment of transformation in Mark, because it is from here that Jesus adjusts his eyes to Jerusalem and the cross. He starts to dive deeper into his ministry, into his role of Rabbi, as teacher, and makes his way towards the cross.

It seems to be a moment in which Jesus himself fully embraces who he is, as well as what he is to do on the cross. It is a beautiful moment in which we get a glimpse into the duality of Jesus' being- the awkward tension of his divinity and humanity-

And as I have said earlier the good news is the mystery in all of this. The mystery of Jesus being fully human and fully divine. The mystery of the red sea parting for Moses. The mystery of

Elijah calling down victory over Carmel. The mystery of a virgin birth. The mystery of the resurrection. The mystery of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. This is the good news, beloved. We don't have to understand it. We just have to have faith and be willing to sit with the uncomfortableness of what we cannot explain.

As Peter said, it is good for us to be here- Here in this place of holy mystery, holy tension...

Embrace the mystery, First Baptist family.

It is good for us to be here. Amen.