

“Three Mountains” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
February 26, 2017 Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday
Matthew 17:1-9

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

As I was walking on the treadmill at the health club reading sermon prep material, Robert, the morning desk worker, was cleaning around the long row of treadmills. As he got closer to the treadmill I was on, I asked him if he'd like to write my sermon in exchange for my taking on his cleaning jobs for the day. He stopped and said he'd be happy to do so, but he didn't think he was qualified to prepare a sermon. That was the answer I expected. But then I then told him the sermon was on the transfiguration. Blank look. I then asked him if he knew what the transfiguration was. He didn't. Not the answer I expected, but should have anticipated.

Just the day before that I was talking to a Christ-follower friend about my sermon topic – the transfiguration – and asked him what he thought about the transfiguration. He stated very concisely that the transfiguration proved that Jesus was God's son and that we should be thankful for God sending Jesus to die on the cross and rise again so we can know we are saved when we have faith in Jesus. I told him, “Good answer and the right answer.” And added, “But if that's all I say my sermon won't be very long!”

The contrast between the two individuals couldn't have been more stark. One wasn't acquainted with the story of Jesus and the other knew Jesus personally.

My Christ-follower friend had it right. The basic explanation of the transfiguration is that it offers one more proof that Jesus is God's son and that we should be thankful for God sending Jesus to die on the cross and be raised from the dead so we can know we are saved.

So, what am I going to preach about?

I was struck by these two conversations and how they related to the transfiguration story. Let's look for a moment at the clueless person in the scripture I read today. The clueless person in the resurrection story is, of course, who else but Peter. Peter figured out that Jesus was the Messiah, but he didn't understand what that really meant. His comment about building three booths? He didn't understand that Jesus was God. He didn't understand that he was following around the son of God. He thought Jesus was the Messiah who had come to save the Hebrew people from Roman rule, not to die on a cross for Peter's sins, your sins and my sins.

Probably all the disciples and those that followed Jesus were clueless. They didn't understand what Jesus was saying when he told them he had to die on the cross and be raised from the dead. The Messiah, as the disciple knew, was a military hero who shouldn't die a common criminal's death.

Be crucified and raised from the dead? Even though the three disciples heard God's confirmation of Jesus, which was almost exactly the same as the confirmation Jesus received from God at his baptism: **"This is my very own Son whom I love very much. I am so proud of him. I want you to listen to what he has to say."** – even though they heard those words, they still didn't understand what was coming.

When Jesus was on another hill or mountain, their hopes of a conquering Messiah were dashed. Jesus was crucified on the top of a hill. Their hope of Jesus being a conquering Messiah died on that cross on Calvary. As Cleopas said on the road to Emmaus, **"we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"** (NIV).

It took another mountain top experience before most of the disciples finally figured out who Jesus really was. They were on the mountain top where Jesus ascended into heaven. It was on this mountain top where most all of them finally understood that Jesus was God. It was on that mountain that Jesus said: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

What about my Christ-follower friend that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon? He knows Jesus, but if he would have been living at the time of Jesus, he probably would have been just as clueless as the disciples. He would have shared society's expectations for a conquering Messiah.

Fortunately for us, we live in the post-resurrection world and know the whole story. We know that Jesus was God's son and that he had to die on a cross and be raised to new life to demonstrate to you and me how much God loves us. We are fortunate to have Jesus' promise: **"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Now that's comforting – to know that Jesus is with us now and will be to the very end of the age.

What about Robert the guy at the gym that didn't know about the transfiguration. Seems like I have some work to do to follow Jesus' command: **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**

You and I live in a post-resurrection world. That's good news! We have the advantage over the disciples of knowing the 'rest of the story.' Most of you are like my Christ-follower friend who knows who Jesus is and loves Jesus dearly. You've been on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus. On another mountain, you've stood sadly at the foot of cross and watched Jesus die. And you've stood on a third mountain and watched Jesus ascend into heaven. Yes, you know who Jesus is.

My questions for you today. You know who Jesus is, but have you been transformed by knowing Jesus? Do you glow from the inside as our scripture says? Are you following the way Jesus lived? And perhaps most importantly, are you making disciples of your neighbors and friends?