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Mark 9:1-9

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Peter had big dreams for Jesus. Only a week ago Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” It was Peter who knew that the right answer was, “You are the Messiah.” But moments later Jesus began to talk about going to a cross, suffering greatly, and being killed. Peter said, “God forbid. This will never happen to you.” Peter was a “can do” kind of guy who believed the point of having a Savior was to avoid things like a cross. But the Lord said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan...you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Of all the disciples, it is easiest for us to relate to Peter. He has committed himself to following Jesus. When called upon, he can usually come up with the right answer, and most importantly, he loves Jesus. But he doesn't always understand him.

So when Jesus invites Peter to come with him and spend time on a mountain, it was a very confused and disillusioned disciple that followed. That's the portrait of most followers of Jesus—confused about where Jesus is leading us and disappointed about where he is not.

How many times have we looked at a desperate situation where the need for Jesus to make a dream come true was so obvious and thought, “Jesus, why don't you do something? In this pandemic so many people have lost their jobs, lost their lives, the world is turned upside down. Do something!” Or when I go to the hospital to visit someone with a terminal disease, I often pray neat and professional prayers at the bedside. But when I head to the parking lot, my prayers get more raw: “I know you, God. I've walked behind you my whole life. I know you can heal.... Do something.”

What about in your life? What dream is there that God just won't rescue? If like Peter, you love our Lord and have followed him for some time, then sooner or later you're going to have a lover's quarrel with Jesus. That's not just because he won't give you what you want, but it's because Jesus won't do what you are sure he wants to do. That's the dilemma. We expect we won't get everything we want for ourselves, but it drives us crazy when Jesus won't come through on his

own agendas of peace, justice, and healing the broken. Why does he insist on heading for the cross?

When you find yourself in that confusion, like Peter you are ready to climb God's mountain. In the Bible the mountains serve as unique ground for the divine-human encounter. It is upon Mt. Sinai that Moses stands before God, and upon Mt. Horeb that Elijah hears God's still, small voice. Now it is upon another high mountain that Jesus takes Peter, along with James and John (two other disciples who have big dreams).

If you've ever stood on the top of a high mountain, you know exactly why God chooses such a setting for these encounters. The tops of high peaks are barren, intimidating places. There is nothing to protect you—no trees or shelter, just rocks, and a lot of wind. If the weather changes, you are so exposed that you could die on the spot. To stand in that place is to place yourself in the hands of forces that you cannot control and that are too great to resist. Actually, we are always in the hands of these forces, but on the mountain top that becomes very obvious.

Worship must always have this sense of being led up the great mountains to stand before God as a people who have risen above the illusion of being in control or of even knowing how to dream. True worship takes us up to the awe-filled encounter with God. That is what all the music, prayers, and liturgy of worship are designed to do—to lead us up to frightening new terrain.

Jesus gets Peter to the top of the mountain and quiets Peter's bright ideas and his dark discouragement. Then Jesus is transformed into a more glorious figure than Peter could have ever imagined: "And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus." Notice that this isn't the frightening part for Peter. He was ready and waiting for that scene. This was big. This was the biggest Jesus yet. This is the Jesus Peter had been hoping for—bright and shiny, hanging out with Moses and Elijah. Without missing a beat, Peter quickly suggests a building program complete with three booths so they can stay right there and capture the glory. As Peter is announcing his strategic plan, suddenly the voice of God interrupts him, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; LISTEN TO HIM!"

Listen to him. Listen to a voice calling you to a new direction, a new identity, even a new understanding of God. Listen. Stop planning. Stop complaining. Let go of the idea of normal. And just listen to Jesus the beloved. When they heard the Word of God, the disciples became afraid. They even fall on their faces in fear.

If we are paying attention in worship, it is you and I who should be on our faces in fear. This is not a fear of being destroyed but of overwhelming awe. And maybe it is the fear that comes with the confession that we have not really been worshipping God, but only our dream of what Jesus would do for us. But now that we have been confronted with the Beloved who has come in search of us, it is time just to listen.

How do we listen to Jesus? It's not by waiting for extraordinary, miraculous voices that may or may not come. It's by listening to the voice we have already heard in Scripture. Peter saw nothing of Jesus on the mountain he had not already heard or heard about. Even the words from heaven had already been spoken at Jesus' baptism. You and I have also already heard all we need to know about Christ. Worship is not about hearing a new word but about renewing our lives in the Word of Life we have received.

I find that most Lutherans suffer from mysticism-envy. We often hear of people who have such wonderful visions, or who tell us about God speaking to them and telling them what to do. We wished we had those unmediated, direct encounters with God. Mysticism is actually not new. It has been around since the beginning of Christianity. It is significant that when Martin Luther wrote the theology that is the foundation of our tradition, he was aware of the mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux and Julian of Norwich who had such extraordinary experiences with hearing God. The Reformers did not deny the legitimacy of these mystical encounters with God, but they did claim that the mystical voices were not necessary. All that we need to know of God has been revealed in Scripture. The only question is: Are we listening to what we know is true, or do we drown out the words of the Bible with our own yearning for something more?

Back when it was warm outside, I took Maloos down to the lower harbor and the park there, by the amazing playground where children were playing. It would be silly for them to keep running to their mother to ask, "Should I play on the slide or the swing set to have a good time?" The mothers have already

explained that it doesn't matter as long as they don't play in the street. God doesn't care if you decide to be a miner or a teacher, to live in the yellow house or the blue house, or if you retire in town or move away. But in Scripture God has already warned us against playing in the street. He already told us how to avoid hurting ourselves and others. We have to love God and love the neighbor as ourselves, and if we are not doing that, then we are hurting both the neighbor and ourselves. But you know that. The question is: Are you listening to it?

We read Scripture not only to avoid finding ourselves in the street, but far more importantly, to listen for the love of the Beloved. Worship approaches Scripture like lovers who just keep reading the same love letter over and over, not just to see the words, but to see the love again. Seeing that, the many anxieties that brought us to the mountain fall by the side.

It is at the point of this discovery that Jesus comes to us as he did to the disciples in Matthew's version of this story, touches us, and says, "Rise and have no fear." Then we are told, "when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." They didn't see Moses or Elijah, any of the old hopes for glory, their discouragement or their disillusionment. They only saw Jesus.

Why do we invite you to come back here week after week? To tune in on the radio or online? It is to renew your focus on the transfigured Christ. When we finish Sunday worship, when we close the web browser or turn off the radio, we see Jesus in our relationships, our work, and all the ordinary places we are called to live. We see his love in the good days and in the hard days. We see him in the common acts of faithfulness to which he has already called us. Listen. We see him as our Beloved. *Amen.*