

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" -- not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

You faithless & perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear w/ you? Boy, if you want Biblical proof: Jesus was fully human, look no further than this passage.

He's not exactly the patient, kind, gentle, "Suffer-the-little-children-to-come-unto-me"

Son of God here; is he? I mean, he's really ticked off!

If we'd dramatize this scene,

we'd have to give it a PG rating for graphic language and violence.

Why is he so upset over a father begging him to heal his only child?

Well, Jesus is just coming off a mountaintop experience, which was nearly spoiled...

when the friends he took up there kept embarrassing him,

and now the crowds come back and immediately demand a miracle...

b/c the disciples Jesus left behind...

couldn't get by without him for 24 hours without messing up.

Of course he was upset!

What are we to make of Jesus' mountaintop experience?

A mountaintop experience is a moment when we are lifted out of our ordinary lives...

and suddenly brought into contact with a higher reality.

It is a moment when we find ourselves face-to-face w/ that which transcends life.

The British Romantic poets (Byron/Shelley/Keats) called these transcendent moments

and constantly bemoaned the fact that they were so short lived.

The Irish writer, James Joyce called them moments of epiphany.

He said that when we look back over our lives,

these moments of revelation stand out like beads on a string.

Jesus needed a moment of epiphany right then.

He was getting ready for his entry into Jerusalem...

and knew as well as we do now how that was going to come out.

He tried to prepare the disciples for this,

but some people just can't be properly prepared.

How had he tried to prepare the disciples?

First, he gave them power over demons and diseases.

Then, he fed five thousand people with a few loaves of bread and fish...
so they would recognize that he would provide for them.

Then, he told them that he would undergo great suffering...
and eventually death at the hands of the church leaders.

Finally, he told them that if they wanted to follow him...
they, too, would have to pick up crosses.

After all this, he was tired.

So, we come to today's Gospel,

where Jesus takes a few of the disciples and goes up a mountain to
pray.

Have you seen/cartoon: a scientist has 1/2 a blackboard filled with complicated
formulas,

which lead to the words, "And then a miracle happens,"

followed by another half of a blackboard filled with formulas?

A second scientist says, "I'm not so sure about that middle step ... "

Well, Jesus is in the process of getting himself and his disciples ready...

for Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter...and then a miracle happens.

Let's not be mistaken, Jesus' mountaintop experience was primarily for his benefit.

Moses and Elijah appear and fill Jesus in on upcoming events.

The three disciples are not privy to this conversation.

In fact, they almost sleep through the whole thing!

We see this tendency toward narcolepsy on the part of the disciples...
again in the garden of Gethsemane.

Three times Jesus tells them to stay awake for they never know...
when the hour is at hand, and three times they fall asleep.

Eventually, he tells them to get up because his arrest is imminent.

They had missed the most important evening of their lives.

But on the mountain, they managed to wake up enough...

to catch the transformation and the appearances but not enough...

to figure out what was going on and avoid embarrassing themselves.

Peter figures the end is already here and wants to put up tents for the three
holy men,

even though two of them are in the process of leaving...

and Jesus has already told him what is to come.

Peter wants to freeze the moment of Christ's glory: he wants to avoid...
all the messiness of the arrest, torture, death, and physical

resurrection.

The Father has to appear in a cloud to straighten the three disciples out.

You can almost hear the exasperation in the terrifying, deep,
well-modulated voice of God, "This is my Son: listen to him now!"

If the disciples' nearly sleeping through the Transfiguration & misinterpreting/whole
thing...

weren't bad enough, when they all return to the world below the mountain,
Jesus is told of his remaining disciples' failure...
to use the gift of healing and exorcism he'd made available to
them.

Once more, their faith just isn't strong enough.

Is it any wonder he calls them a "faithless and perverse generation"...
and questions how much longer he can stand being with them...
and put up with their foolishness?

If the Bible is to have any relevance to us today, the Bible stories must become our
story.

We can do this by asking which characters are meant to represent us.

Let me give you a clue to unlocking the New Testament in this regard:
we are the Pharisees/Sad. in their smugness, judgmentalism, self-
worship.

And when they aren't on the scene, we are the disciples/the people
of Israel

in their laziness, ignorance, and appalling lack of faith.

Like the three on the mountain, we often fall asleep,

too wearied by the day's events to trouble ourselves with spiritual
concerns.

When we do deign to get involved, we go all the wrong directions,
looking for easy answers that benefit us the most...
and don't involve much effort on our part.

How many of us want to go from Palm Sunday straight to Easter w/o having
to deal...

with the pain/self-examination required by the season of Lent and Good
Friday?

One/my profs. said he was always tempted as a pastor to stand at the door on Easter
Sun...

and tell those who had missed Wednesday Lenten and Good Friday services,
"You might as well go home; you've already missed it!"

Without death, there is no rebirth!

You can't freeze the Son of God in his moment of glory:

he was crucified for our sins, died and was buried.

It was only after all this had happened that he was raised from the dead...

and ascended to sit at the right hand of God the Father.

We worship a Christ crucified and, like this Christ,

we must endure hardships for the faith and carry our crosses in love.

Finally, like the disciples who didn't go up the mountain,

we lack the mustard seed-sized faith necessary to perform miracles in this world.

We put our faith in medical science, psychology, technology, governments, and law enforcement agencies.

And when these fail to produce miracles, we ask, "Where is God?"

When doctors can't heal the sick, when psychologists can't exorcise demons, when technology can't eliminate poverty, when govts. can't end social injustice,

when the police and the judges and the lawyers can't eliminate crime,

we feel helpless, hopeless, and lost.

How can this be when we worship a God who heals the sick,

has power over the demonic, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked,

brings justice to the world? Our faith is obviously misplaced.

This God we worship comes by invitation only.

Sure, God could appear in all his glory now and make everything right.

The world would certainly bow down before such a God,

but this would be the action...

of slaves prostrating themselves before a mighty ruler.

We are free men and free women who must choose to serve,

who must pick up their crosses willingly and follow the

example/the Son.

Such an act of faith is a miracle in itself, a miracle which produces miracles.

I urge you to go to the mountain this Lenten season.

Confront God in all your sinfulness,

ask for and receive the forgiveness which allows you to repent.

But don't try to stay up there and build tents to the glory of God.

Come down with our Lord, pick up your cross,

and follow him to the dark place of pain, loneliness, and betrayal.

It is only out of the ashes of that place...

that the bright phoenix that is the true glory of God can arise.

To be reborn, you must first die.

That is the way of life, the way of the cross and the empty tomb.