

March 1, 2015
Mark 9:2-10
What Are We Missing
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Mark 9:2-10 (NRSV)

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

We begin our season of Lent on Ash Wednesday. For those who were not present, we opened this year’s Ash Wednesday service with a reading of the poem “The Holy in the Ordinary,” by Ann Weems.¹ The poem speaks to how we recognize the time of Lent as being a Holy time, yet how difficult it is to find the Holy. We are so busy with “living in the real world,” as Weems puts it, that we don’t have the time to seek the Holy, and thus miss what is Holy in our ordinary lives.

For me, today’s text (known as the Transfiguration) speaks directly to how easy it is for us to miss the holiness of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy in our midst. I see it in the example of the disciples Peter, James and John. If we consider the disciples’ understanding of Jesus before the Transfiguration took place, there’s little wonder why Jesus is trying to get their attention. To get them to see the Holy in the ordinary. A few examples. After he shares with them the Parable of the Sower, (Chapter 4, verse 13) ... “[h]e said to them [the disciples] “Do you not understand this parable?” (Chapter 4, verse 13) At the end of Chapter 4 (vs 37-38, 40), ‘a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was being swamped.’” Jesus was asleep in

¹ Weems, Ann *Kneeling in Jerusalem*, (large print edition), Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.p 13.

the stern. The disciples woke him up presumptively terrified, believing that they were all going to die. Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still not faith?”

The healing of two females takes place in chapter 5 – the first is the hemorrhaging woman who touches Jesus’ cloak – and when he asked “Who touched my clothes?” the disciples respond “You see the crowd pressing in on you: how can you say, “Who touched me?” (5:30-31) Their fear and doubt is palpable.

The second miracle healing is of the daughter of a Jewish religious leader. It is interesting in the context of today’s text that it is only Peter, James and John whom Jesus invites to go into the house with him. Jesus invites them to witness what is often understood as a miracle healing and even as a resurrection story. In this story, the girl’s family believes her to be dead. What Peter, James, and John are privileged to witness Jesus saying to this child ““Talitha cum, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ and she gets up.”

And now here we are with Jesus, again, inviting only Peter, James and John up the mountain to witness an extraordinary display of Jesus’ Divinity. To witness what it is Holy. It seems to me that Jesus is trying to get through to these three what they so far have failed to see, and thus not understand. Despite the healings, the miracles, the teachings they are missing the Holy in their midst; the Holy in the Ordinary.

Doesn’t it seem that if you or I were witness to such a thing and Jesus’ transfiguration, the presence of Moses and Elijah, and a voice telling us, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” we would be forever transformed and our vision and understanding of Jesus’ presence would be so clear and sure? That we would listen!?

I am not so sure of that. I would be more like Peter, terrified, and in response to my fear of witnessing something beyond imagination, I would try to create a place of ordinary in the extraordinary as he does when he offers to make three dwellings – to ground what is ungrounded.

The theme of the messianic secret, of Jesus telling the disciples and others to not tell others what they have witnessed is throughout the Gospel of Mark. Perhaps a literary tool, but perhaps Jesus really did instruct them to not say anything, because he knew they did not get it, they did not get him; they did not understand or appreciate the divine, the holy, in the ordinary. Clearly the Transfiguration didn't fix that. Further in Mark we read about James and John asking Jesus for special treatment; that one sit on Jesus left and one on his right. Jesus responds (10:38) "You do not know what you are asking." And we all know Peter denied Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested.

Considering all this it would be easy to say, well, here were three men who did not appreciate Jesus. They did not see the Holy in their ordinary lives when he was living among them; actually walking and talking with them; breaking bread together, so it's no wonder we don't see Jesus in our midst, the Holy in the ordinary. I rather would like to understand today's text not as support for not seeing Jesus in the world, in ourselves and in others, but as a challenge to us – those of us who claim the name Christian more than 2000 years after Jesus walked on this earth – to see Jesus and to experience the Holy in our ordinary lives.

As we celebrate the sacrament of communion this morning, may the Holy in our midst we sense and experience as we receive the Bread of Life and the Cup of Blessing stay with us when we leave this holy place. May it remind us, on a daily basis, on a daily basis to ask, "What are we missing?". Then may we look for, see, and respond with love to the Holy in the ordinary.