

“Tents” -Transfiguration Sunday

I) What happened and why?

Does this story remind you of anything? – It’s all like what happened to Moses

17:1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. [And they were surrounded by a cloud]

Moses was on mount Sinai when he was enveloped by the smoke and God talked to him. (Exodus 24:16) Being in the cloud, must have freaked the three disciples with Jesus. Only a handful of Godly people had even been in the presence of God’s cloud. Peter, James, and John must have looked at themselves and realized that they were no priests, they weren’t holy, they were just regular guys. And yet, the cloud did not suffocate them. It did not blind them, it did not stop up their ears. God’s holy cloud protected them – making space and time for a very special moment with God.

2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Jesus’ face glowed, just like Moses’ face after seeing God on mount Sinai. However, the more important fact is that Jesus was transfigured – Paul also uses this word and it means ‘actually changed...not just a change of appearance, but physically different than before.’ For a moment, Jesus gave us a glimpse of his coming glory. Some say this is the kind of new body we all will receive, for we will be like Christ. We will be in the presence of God and will reflect his glorious light. Wow, could it get any better than this? I wish they had a camera phone with them.

3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

There are all sorts of ideas as to why these two figures appeared with Jesus. In some circles, Moses and Elijah were thought to be the forerunners of the coming of the Messiah. In Deu 18:15, Moses told the people: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” [why Elijah?] Also, Moses the Jews connected with the law, and Elijah they connected with the Prophets. Because they talked with Jesus, it validated to them that Jesus was the messiah. All I know is that it seemed important that they were talking with Jesus. They didn’t just arrive and wave, nodding their heads “sup Jesus.” They talked with him. I do not know what they said or how Jesus responded, but I can guess it was meant for Jesus alone.

The real lesson in what happened is that a **high mountain** became a *sacred mountain*. God took and every day experience and blessed it with his presence. [x2] Many times these three disciples would go apart with Jesus to pray – most often to a hill top. Now, every time thereafter they would be on a hill, they would remember Jesus transfigured before their eyes.

II) Peter's Remark

There are three accounts in the gospels about the transfiguration. We read Matthew's account. The other two – Mark's and Luke's, contain a parenthetical ("He did not know what to say, for they were terrified," in Mark 9:6. and "not knowing what he said," in Luke 9:33) For Mark and Luke, looking back, it seemed that it was illogical for Peter to want to build a tent for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Mark apologized for Peter on account that he and James and John were afraid. Luke seems also apologized on account either that they were afraid or that they were sleepy.

Both probably agreed to the argument in Acts 7:44-50:

"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him. "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men." As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?"

So Peter's desire to build tents, seemed to two of the gospel writers to be another attempt by Peter to bypass the suffering Jesus had taught them was about to come. The danger of Peter's statement is satisfaction. The danger of thinking you have arrived and all is well. Saying, "Let's stay here..." often blocks the possibilities of life. This is especially dangerous when we do this with our spiritual life. Faith that is not given room to grow and withers in its pot and cannot achieve the beauty and blossom God intends.

Matthew, however, did not slight Peter for his comment. I think he saw that Peter just wanted to prolong the wonderful, awe-inspiring experience before him. Perhaps he even thought it was time for the "Ultimate" Feast of Tabernacles – Yearly, it was the holiest and greatest of the Hebrew feasts. Zechariah had a vision that at the reign of the messiah, all of the nations would come to Jerusalem for this great feast.

Zechariah 14:16-17

16 Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 17 If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain.

Perhaps Peter thought, if only the world could come a see the three he saw before him, then they would bow at his greatness. You see the Jews expected the messiah to come to reign. They never thought that there even needed to be anything but conquering. Peter thought that God had come to dwell with us – for good!

Peter's remark was faithful, but premature. Let us not be like Peter and be faithful at the wrong time. Let us spend time with God in prayer and scripture to make sure that the statements and actions we make through our faith are in God's good timing. Then we can blossom into the beauty God intended for us in the proper season.

III) God Spoke.

“This is my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him.”

This was the same voice that commissioned Jesus at his baptism. These words definitively proclaimed the divinity of Jesus to the three disciples. There was no more doubt or confusion about who Jesus was. However, I can imagine that these words from God also strengthened Jesus in his commitment to go to the cross – to go through suffering and shame in order to be obedient to God. To die so that we might triumph.

Lent begins wed and we should remember that God came for both God and for us.

IV) Then they saw Jesus Only.

Moses and Elijah were no longer there and Jesus was no longer shining like the sun. They saw no one except Jesus. Moses and the law could not save them. Could not make them pure. Elijah and the prophets could not scare them straight.

Jesus was the only one who could bring them back and bring us into relationship with God. Jesus is sufficient. No one except Christ can understand our waywardness and yet still forgive us with the depth of divine love. No one except Jesus could pay the ransom for our freedom from the power of sin and death over our lives. A ransom due to God for our unfaithfulness.

Jesus only is sufficient, for He alone has the words of eternal life.

V) Conclusion

The transfiguration event was confirmation for the faith of Peter, James, and John. It strengthened and excited the early church. It reminds us of the fact that Jesus Christ is LORD. The first born from the dead. One who already lives in His resurrection body. All because he was willing to take the form of a servant. To be found in the likeness of one of us, and to humble himself on a cross.