

I SAW THE LIGHT (Matthew 17:1-9)

A man says to his doctor, "I'm really worried. Every time I drink a cup of coffee, I feel a stabbing pain in my eye. Do you think it's serious?" The doctor replied, "I can cure you instantly. Try taking the spoon out of your cup!"

We may not have a spoon blinding us and causing pain in our eyes, but chances are, at times, we see things from a certain perspective...a certain way that may very well prevent us from seeing things more clearly. We all form certain opinions of others based on how we see them. Sometimes however, it is possible for us to be mistaken.

In Matthew 16, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They came up with a number of answers. Then Jesus asked, "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Well, Peter was right, but he still did not understand what that meant, because a few verses later, when Jesus predicts His own death, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" Jesus replied: "Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John on a hike where His face began to shine like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Then He is joined by none other than Moses and Elijah (who represent the Law and the Prophets), and of course, Jesus is the fulfillment of both. What happens on the mountain that day confirms that Jesus is God's Divine Son, and gives the disciples a preview of what life will look like in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then Peter, who six days earlier had been told that Jesus is going to be killed at the bottom of the mountain, quickly gets a fantastic idea: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Made sense to Peter, and it makes sense to us.

But while Peter was still talking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from inside the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" In other words, Peter, James, John, *plus* you and I, have to be reminded that it's 'Jesus' Way' we must follow, not ours.

"Listen to Him!" Sounds easy right? But it's not as easy as it would seem. One reason is that listening to Jesus means following Him; following Jesus means becoming like Him by treating others with love and kindness. It means being transfigured - like Jesus. Obviously we can't experience a physical transfiguration, but we can modify our behaviour and our attitudes.

Jesus has just told His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it."

Take up my cross??? Deny myself??? Lose my life??? No wonder when the disciples heard the voice from the cloud, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

Author and priest Rick Morley had this to say about the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration: "The transfiguration isn't a small thing. It's not a fresh coat of paint. It's not even an upgraded operating system. It's metamorphosis. It's wholesale change. From the bottom up. From the inside out. And, to be honest...it's not always something that I want. I like how I am. I like my sinful indulgences. I'm used to my petty discriminations. The way I am, as broken and flawed as it is, is at least comfortable. I know it like the back of my hand. It's easy. I don't even have to think about it.

Other times though, I want to change. I want to do a new thing. But summoning the energy to begin that change, or sustaining the energy past a few days or so, seems nearly impossible. So, when the disciples are overcome with fear on the mountaintop, I get it. I think I'd be overcome too. I'm not so sure that they're overwhelmed by the pyrotechnics. They've seen a good deal of what Jesus can do. But the mountaintop is a place of transformation, of metamorphosis.

Jesus went to the mountaintop not just to be transfigured himself, but to offer Peter, James, and John the space to be transfigured with him. He was offering them wholesale change. He was offering them the opportunity to shine like the sun too. And that scared the *you-know-what* out of them. Because sometimes staying right where you are, in the shadows, is far more tempting."

Peter had wanted to build shrines on the mountain and stay there forever. God had other things in mind. When the voice from the cloud said: "Listen to him!" I think the disciples had a pretty good idea what that meant.

It meant that they would soon be headed back down the mountain where they would encounter more of what they had seen for the past three years. They would come upon the sick and the insane whom Jesus would touch and make well. They would be taught radical things that would go so against their human nature, (but of which they would be fully convicted was the right way to do things), that they couldn't help but be changed, moved by them - like someone hit a "reset button" on their entire way of looking at the world. Change is scary. Going against the grain of the world is scary. Different thinking is scary.

When we open ourselves to new life through Christ, we are never the same again. I wonder if more people would do it, if it weren't for their fear of change?

So here are the disciples. They have just heard God's voice saying to them: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" They are facedown in the mud trembling in fear - terrified, even. And what are we told happens next? Jesus came and touched them. "Get up", He said. "Don't be afraid!"

I think these three words are among the most important words, not just in this passage, but in the whole of Scripture. Think about it. These words - "don't be afraid" - are used again and again in the Gospels. They are the words with which the angel Gabriel greets Mary in the quiet of her home, in order to bring her the message that she will soon become pregnant and give birth to Jesus—the Son of the Most High.

They are the same three words that the heavenly host say to the shepherds as they keep watch over their flocks by night. They are the same three words Jesus says to His fearful disciples when they see Him walking on water. In Matthew 28 it is what the resurrected Christ says to the two Mary's as they come upon Him while hurrying from the empty tomb on Easter morning. "Don't be afraid." Powerful words!

And they are even more powerful when you think about the fact that they are followed by Jesus' instructions to the disciples to "get up." Except it's not just "get up," it's "be raised." It's the same words used to describe Jesus' resurrection...He has "been raised". He is no longer here.

So, let us think about the latter part of the story one more time. God's voice from heaven affirms Jesus' identity as His beloved Son and commands Peter, James and John to listen to Him - hear His words, follow His commands, do what He says, follow Him, become like Him. In response, they fall to the ground in terror.

And then Jesus reaches out, touches them and commands them, literally, to be raised and no longer fear. And isn't this what God is saying to every single one of us? To you who are dealing with illness, lockdown depression, brokenness, and heartache - Jesus is reaching out, touching you and saying, "Be raised and no longer fear!"

To you who are living in terror as to what this world is coming to, as you watch the news day in and day out - Jesus is reaching out, touching you and saying, "Be raised and no longer fear!"

To you who are thinking about following Jesus but are afraid of what that might entail, Jesus is reaching out, touching you and saying: "Be raised and no longer fear!" The same resurrection power which brought Jesus' broken, crucified body back to life...the same Resurrection power that caused a small band of once frightened women and men to stand up to the very powers who killed Jesus and proclaim Him Lord and Christ...the very same resurrection power that caused a small group of people with no political clout to start the most powerful and life changing movement the world has ever seen...that same power is here, and available to every one of us. All we have to do is listen, to allow Him to touch us and listen to Him when He says, "Be raised and no longer fear."

We need to let go of *our* need to be in control. We fear the future because it is the great unknown. Let's just let God's plan for our daily lives unfold. Isn't that an exhilarating prospect rather than a fearful one?

And what about the past? Let's release the power the past has over us. Depression can only creep in if we dwell on what has already happened. It's beyond our control, beyond our fixing. It's done and over with. Isn't that 'smile-worthy'?

Open your eyes to the positives of the 'now' and be at peace. Count those present blessings.

*Cast your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full on His glorious face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Amen and Amen!