

Transfiguration  
Mark 9:2-9  
February 15, 2015

*After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

Before the corporation board meeting, the treasurer handed the secretary an envelope. Later in the meeting, the chairman asked the secretary for some information. The secretary said he didn't have that information. The treasurer spoke up, “You have that information. It was in the envelope I gave you.”

The secretary replied, “Oh. I didn't know what that was so I threw it away.”

I wonder how many of us have done that. We don't know what something is so we throw it away. We ignore it. We put it on hold or we neglect it. We feel something tug at us. We feel something wash over us. We feel something move us. We don't know what it is so we throw it away.

Today's Gospel reading is the familiar story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Most of us have probably heard and read this story many times. It is very reassuring to hear about Jesus displaying his glory to Peter, James, and John because that means we have eyewitnesses to his deity.

Peter's eyewitness report is recorded in 2 Peter 1:16-18: *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.*

As we consider the revelation of this miracle, we are going to look at the three witnesses. Peter, James, and John witnessed the most amazing thing that had ever taken place since Creation. What they saw on that mountain was bigger than Sarah having a baby when she was 90 years old. It was bigger than the Red Sea parting for

the Israelites to cross. It was bigger than the walls of Jericho caving in. It was even bigger than Jesus walking on water and calming the storm.

What Peter, James, and John saw on that mountain is something that no one else has ever seen on this side of the grave. Those men saw Jesus in all his glory. At least they saw as much of it as their human eyes would allow. Right before their eyes, the divine nature of Jesus shown out through his human nature. Those three came as close as any living human to seeing the face of God and living.

Not only did they get a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature, they heard the voice of God, the Father, testifying to whom Jesus was. With their own ears, they heard Almighty God say, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Do you think those three men came down from that mountain exactly the same as they went up? I don't think so. Do you think those three understood precisely what happened up there and all its ramifications? I don't think so. Do you suppose, since they couldn't fully comprehend what they had just witnessed, those three disciples just decided to ignore the fact that it really happened? I don't think so. Do you think that during their walk down the mountain Peter, James, and John tried to figure out just how Jesus could pull off such an elaborate hoax? I don't think so.

Those men witnessed a true miracle of God and they never forgot it. They also followed the instruction they received from the Father. They saw, they heard, and they listened to Jesus. They followed Jesus. They did the things Jesus did. They taught the things Jesus taught. Do you know why? Because on that mountain, Jesus wasn't the only one who was transfigured.

Those men were also transfigured. They were transformed. They were changed. Put yourself in their place. Could you have been a witness to what they saw and stay the same? Of course not. The rest of your life would be different. Just like the rest of their lives were different. These men witnessed a miracle that changed them forever.

Now, just in case you think these three weren't changed forever, let's stop for just one minute and see how they lived the rest of their lives. Scripture records James as the second Christian martyr. James held to what he knew to be true and suffered beheading rather than deny his Savior.

Peter was crucified by Nero during a period of severe persecution. Tradition tells us that Peter opted to be crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die in the same manner as Christ.

John, the only apostle not to die a violent death, didn't escape persecution. John was exiled for his faith and spend much of his senior years on the island of Patmos.

Do you think there's a chance that what Peter, James, and John saw on that mountain had anything to do with the way they lived the rest of their lives? Do you think that witnessing a miracle can change a life? Do you think witnessing a miracle should change a life? Are you sitting there wondering, "Where in the world is he going with this?"

My point is this. Peter, James, and John were forever changed because of what they saw and heard. They heard God's words and they saw God move in a powerful way. We read this account and we have no problem with their transfiguration. We are even willing to say that if we heard and saw such things we, too, would be different.

I have another question. Are you transfigured? You should be. You have heard God's powerful words. You hear God speak from his holy Scripture. You hear God in worship. You hear God in Bible study. You hear God in the voice of other people. You hear God in music. You hear God in your quiet times as he gently speaks to your heart. Are you transfigured?

You have also witnessed miracles. The miracles the disciples saw changed them. Are you transfigured by the miracles you have seen? Or are you one of the people who don't believe in miracles. Or maybe you are someone who thinks miracles were fine in Jesus' time but they don't happen anymore. Here are three modern-day miracles that should change your mind.

Some years back a plane crashed on takeoff from Detroit Metro Airport. Many of you should remember this. Northwest flight 255 only attained a height of 50 feet before problems developed. The plane crashed into the shoulder of I-94. That crash killed 155 people aboard that plane and two motorists on the highway. But a little four-year-old girl survived that crash. In the carnage of such a horrific accident one little girl lived. Can you see the hand of God in that?

Some years ago, there was an apartment fire in New York. On the third floor of that burning building was a young mother and her one month old son. Seeing no hope of escape, the mother asked God to protect her son and then dropped her baby from that window. Felix Vasquez, the catcher on his company's baseball team, saw what was happening and caught that baby. Can you see the hand of God in that?

At this point, there should be someone here thinking, "That's all just coincidence." For that person, or those people, I give you the true story of Barb and Dave Anderson and the folks who were returning with them from Siberia. I heard this story from Dave and Barb Anderson, and from Don Wharton, another Christian musician who was on the plane.

Dave Anderson is the son of a Lutheran pastor. He and Barb spend their lives in missionary work, using music as one of their prime vehicles for spreading the Gospel. After a successful mission trip to Siberia, Dave and Barb, along with five other people were flying to Alaska when their plane crashed in the Bering Straits.

As the plane sank in the 36° water, the passengers grabbed empty five-gallon fuel cans to use as life preservers. Life expectance in water that cold is no more than 15 minutes. Are you ready for the miracle? All seven people from that plane survived. Not miraculous enough? The first one rescued had been in the water for 35 minutes. Want more? Barb Anderson was the last one out and she was in that 36° water for one hour and five minutes. These are the only people who have ever survived a plane crash in the Bering Straits. Can anyone fail to see the hand of God in that?

God is still speaking to us just like he spoke to those disciples. God is still performing miracles for us to see just as he performed the miracle that those disciples saw. If we don't hear God speaking and we don't see his miracles, it's because we're not listening and we're not keeping our eyes open.

I began by telling you the amusing little tale about the secretary throwing away an envelope because she didn't know what it was. However, there's a word of caution in that story. How often do we fail to understand what God is trying to tell us in his Word, in circumstances, through other people, so we ignore it? How often do we call a miracle a coincidence and just throw it away?

God wants to transfigure our lives as surely as he transfigured the lives of Peter, James, and John. God wants us to stay open to what he has to say and to what he is doing around us. If we listen with the ears of faith, if we see with the eyes of faith, God will tell us and show us miraculous things, and we will be transfigured.