

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word

February 15, 2015

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Clarksburg, WV

Mark 9:2-9

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (Mark 9:8 N.R.S.V.)

You Can't Get There From Here

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

When I was a boy, my Dad worked at a sawmill in Pickens. He was in charge of the crew that loaded the lumber onto tractor-trailers. If you have ever been to Pickens, you know that it is at the end of the black top road. There are several dirt roads leading out of Pickens, but only one asphalt road. That road is very narrow and dangerous and the truck drivers often complained about it. One day one of the trucks was late getting to the mill. Apparently the driver had missed the turn off in Mill Creek and ended up in Valley Head. He stopped at and asked an old man for directions into Pickens.

The old man reckoned that the shortest way into Pickens from there was a dirt road that leads through the Kumbrow State Forest, over Turkey Bone Mountain then down into Pickens. He started giving directions to the tractor trailer driver about landmarks to look for and turns to take. Suddenly the old fella realized that there was a really sharp and narrow turn in that dirt road that a tractor trailer couldn't get around. Suddenly, he stopped and blurted out, "You can't get there from here."

My Dad came home that night and told us all about it. He thought that was so funny. I always imagine the driver looking at that guy and saying, "What do you mean I can't get there from here? Here is where I am."

Obviously the driver could get to Pickens from there and he did. He just had to take a longer route.

I was reminded of that story when I read the passage from Mark about the transfiguration of Jesus. It is a very strange and mysterious story. In many ways it is a story that we modern people are not sure what we are supposed to do with. It doesn't fit into our normal everyday lives. There isn't a neat little practical application that I can tell you to apply to your lives.

Yet it is at the same time a powerful and moving story that operates on a whole other level in our lives. Stories like this remind us that Christianity is a revealed faith. There is no way that we could have come up with something like this on our own.

We live in a world with a scientific mind set where we move from one point to another point and discover the truth for ourselves. We operate on the principle that if we take things and events apart enough, we can understand them and make them serve us.

Stories like this don't fit however. To our rational, logical driven minds, this is $2 + 2 = 5$ story. The challenge of this text is to stop trying to take the story apart so that we can make it serve us. Instead we are to allow the story to somehow embrace us, draw us in, and come to life in us.

It is a different way of thinking and living. So many people in our modern world claim to be religious or at least spiritual. Spiritual seems to be the more popular word these days. People go around trying to discover what God is like for themselves. The popular thing is to work faith out for yourself. It is all about, "What works for you."

The problem is that we human beings can't get there from here. When we try to discover and work out God for ourselves what we end up worshiping is not God at all, but merely a projection of our own ideas and imagination. We end up worshiping a idol that we made for ourselves, and we call that idol, God. In short we end up worshiping ourselves.

Christianity is a revealed faith. We human beings simply cannot get there from here. It is not a matter of going around by another way. It is more a matter of standing still and letting God come to us.

I read once about a little girl who was lost in the woods. She wandered off from a camp and couldn't find her way back. She wandered around in a big circle for several hours until her frantic parents were able to find her. When she saw her Dad coming, she ran to him and threw her arms around him. "Daddy," she said, "I finally found you."

It might have seemed that way to the little girl, but of course, her parents found her.

The same is true for God. We don't find God. God finds us. God comes to us and fills us.

The Psalmist writes, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) The Hebrew word, "raphah," means to cause to fall, to let go. Let go, and know that I am God.

In those days people often went up to the top of the mountains to be with God. So Moses goes up to the top of the mountain to receive the ten commandments. And here Jesus leads his inner circle of disciples up the mountain so that they can encounter God.

Some scholars say that the people of Bible times believed that the barrier between heaven and earth was thinner at the top of the mountains. It is a nice thought. But the other thing is that

people tended to live in the lush valleys and avoid the more barren mountain tops. So going up the mountain is also a metaphor for stepping out of the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Going to the mountain top is not about the effort to climb the mountain, it is about being still long enough to be found by God.

We come to worship for the same reason. This is a holy place where generations of people have worshiped God and been encountered by God. It is a place where the barrier between heaven and earth is worn thin if you will.

Some people say they come to church in search of some practical wisdom that they can apply to make their lives better. That can and does happen in worship. Some people say they come to church to learn more about God. That can and does happen here.

Yet the main reason we gather for worship is to worship God. It is always my prayer that while you are here, you will encounter God. Or perhaps I should say, you will be encountered by God.

So I am going to stop my flow of words and invite you to let this story live into you. Here you are in this holy place, on a metaphorical mountain where the veil between heaven and earth is very thin. As I read this story again, I invite you to be still, to let go of your agendas, and all the things you have to do. Be still and let this story live into you. Be still long enough to be found by God, . . . embraced by God. Listen to the story and after the story is read, I invite you to remain still and open to God.

Amen.