

Text: Mark 9:2-9
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Have you ever heard the saying that “Life is simply a series of peaks and valleys?” You most likely have. In other words, life is simply a strung together series of events- some good some bad. The “good ones” are the peaks. These are the “mountain top” experiences of life: marriage, the birth of a child, a promotion, or winning the lottery. The “bad” experiences are the valleys: death of a loved one, illness, loss of employment, or personal struggles.

Of course, during the peaks (or the good times) it is easy to feel blessed and loved by God. After all, when things are going good we are pretty sure that God is good. Often the better we feel, the better we feel about God.

But as each of us gathered here this Sunday morning knows, life is simply not one peak after another (imagery courtesy of Pastor D. Schultz). We do not simply dance from one good time to another. Outward impressions aside, nobody leads a perfect life free from pain and struggle.

To be sure, as humans we are confronted with many “valleys” throughout our daily lives. Sickness, depression, illness, and fear are only a few of the things that can lead us to thinking that we are trapped in a bottomless pit.

During these “valley” moments, it is often hard for people to feel close to God, or even blessed or loved. During the pains of life, many faithful Christians have asked those age old questions, Why do bad things happen to good people?, Does God really love me?, or is God really good?

Of course these are difficult questions, and they are ones that every Christian will ask from time to time during difficult periods. Undoubtedly, it is the valleys of life, not the peaks, which work to test our faith (1Cor.10:13).

But you know what? The valleys of life are important. Because without them we would never appreciate the peaks. In other words, if we never went through bad times, we would never appreciate the good times.

And appreciate the good times we do. That is why you will often hear a bride and groom say to each other on their wedding day, “I wish this day could last forever!” or our appreciation for the peaks of life is what makes us want to always extend our vacations just a few more days or relive cherished memories through pictures and story telling.

Today in our Gospel reading we hear of how Peter, James, and John witness the greatest “mountain top experience” of all time- the Transfiguration of our Lord. And, of course, recognizing the miraculous nature of this event, they never wanted it to end. Of course they wanted to revel in the good times with Christ and forgo the suffering and persecution that was to come.

Imagine with me for a moment, what Peter, James and John saw on that mountain. One minute they are walking with Jesus- and the next moment, Christ is transfigured right before them. What did this transfiguration look like? Well, we are told that Jesus shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white. Considering the use of metaphor here, I would say that this description only begins to tell the story.

And if this wasn't enough to shake the disciples, the great prophets Moses and Elijah appear and begin to talk with Christ. Now, Peter, witnessing all of this glory comes to the conclusion that what he is seeing is in fact a good thing. Thus he decides that he should build three houses. 1. For Jesus, 1. For Moses, and 1. For Elijah. So that everybody can stay there and revel in the moment.

But before Peter could finish his thought, a booming voice comes forth from the heavens and declares, “This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased- listen to him!”.

I can only imagine what the disciples thought when they had finished seeing and hearing all of this. But I am willing to bet that they thought it was a good sign. Surely after this display of power and majesty not one of them was thinking to themselves that this event would cause Christ to predict his own suffering and death. But of course, that is what happened (Mark 9:12-13).

While the disciples saw one thing, it is only through the eyes of history that we can truly comprehend the significance of

this event.

Just witnessing this display of power, surely the disciples must have thought that this is it. That Christ was indeed the true messiah. In witnessing God's awesome power, it was obvious to these disciples that this was indeed the messiah that was going to overthrow governments and make every army bow to their knee.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is how those early disciples interpreted this event. But of course, things were not as they appeared. For on the way down the mountain, Christ gives them a totally different perspective. While the disciples envisioned one thing, Christ knew another.

Rather than going forth and proclaiming this miraculous event, the disciples are ordered to keep quiet about this vision until the resurrection (Mark 9:9). At this point, one has to ask themselves "Why?". Why on earth would Jesus want them to keep such an event quiet.

After all, through this event prophecy is fulfilled in the persons of Moses and Elijah- and Christ is indeed affirmed as the Son of God. Why on earth shouldn't they run through the countryside proclaiming what they have seen? Well, one possible answer for this might be located in God's own words. Notice what God says to these disciples, "This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased- Listen To Him!"

"Listen To Him"? This seems an odd choice of words. After all, a miraculous display is going on right in front of them. The great prophets are there, Christ has taken on a divine image- And God Says, "Listen to Him"? With all of these miraculous sights going on, it would appear that a better choice of words would have been, "Here is my beloved Son, LOOK AT Him!". "Listen to him", just doesn't seem to fit.

Or does it? Yes, this is the Son of God. Yes, this is the triumphant messiah. But it is also the Lord who was born in a manger. This is also the Lord that countryside in poverty while preaching a radical message about God's love. And most definitely, this is the Lord that suffered and died on the cross for the sins of the world.

Considered in this light, ours is not a Lord who desired to ogled or stared at- or even placed above those whom he served. Rather, ours is a Lord that wants to be heard. Ours is a Lord who chooses to approach us with the Gospel rather than pomp and ceremony. For transformation comes from the hearing rather than the seeing.

But what kind of transformation does the Word of God work upon us? For surely our faces do not shine and clothes do not turn a dazzling white. So what kind of transformation do we undergo when we encounter the Word of God?

Martin Luther in his wisdom gave this very question a lot of thought. After much study and struggle, he realized that the Word of God evokes two experiences in us. Firstly, the Word of God, as evidenced by the Law, convicts. It points to our sin and fallen-ness. It shines light on those shadowy areas of our self that we too often want to ignore.

But the Word of God, as evidenced by the Gospel of Christ, also works to liberate us and free us from the chains of sin. For when we hear the Gospel we are assured of Christ's love for us and humanity. It's an epic of love and grace which still reverberates in our hearts. This is the transformation to which we cling.

But of course this transformation is not merely internal. This can also be a transformation of the visible. For when our sins are cleansed and our hearts our lightened from the burdens of sin, we can focus on the needs of our neighbor, for we no longer have to worry about ourselves and our place in the kingdom of God.

Or maybe after being transformed by the power of the Gospel, we choose to search for justice for those who are marginalized. In other words, because we have been loved, we are moved to love others.

Throughout the peaks and valleys of life, in our joys, our struggles, our happiness, and our sadness one thing remains constant: God's love for us.

This is not weak "greeting card" love, this is not meant to be experienced as "puppy-dog" love rather, God's love is a "transforming" love. This is the love that we see at work in the life of Christ, and hopefully it is a love that we experience daily in our own lives.

We might not have had the mountain top experience that Christ had, our clothes may not sparkle, and our faces may not shine...But make no mistake about it- God transforming power is at work in each of our lives.

Amen