

TRANSFIGURATION

February 26, 2017

Matthew 17:1-9:

***“From Here to There,
But Not Without the In-Between”***

I. The Here.

II. The There.

III. The In-Between

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St. Matthew 17:1-9

Dear Friends in Christ,

I read about an incident a man by the name of David McCasland experienced some years ago. He told about a woman whose car was stalled at an intersection. The woman had raised the hood of the car, and, then, flagged McCasland down for help. Here's the account:

"I can't get (the car) started,' she said. 'But if you jiggle the wire on the battery, I think it will work.' McCasland grabbed the positive battery cable and it came off in his hand. It was obviously too loose! 'The terminal needs to be tightened up,' he told her. 'I can fix it if you have some tools.' The woman replied, 'My husband says to just jiggle the wire. It always works. Why don't you just try that?' McCasland thought to himself, 'Then why doesn't her husband drive around with her all the time so he can jiggle the cable.' Finally he said, 'Ma'am, if I jiggle the wire, you're going to need someone else to do it every time you shut the engine off. If you'll give me two minutes and a wrench, we can solve the problem and forget about it.' Reluctantly, she fumbled under the front seat and then extended a crescent wrench through the window.

"As he repaired the terminal, McCasland thought about the many times he tried to get 'quick fixes' from God. 'I have this problem, Lord, and if You'll just jiggle the wire, things will be ok. I'm in a hurry, so let's just get me going again the quickest way possible.'"

At the Mount of Transfiguration we learn that God doesn't simply jiggle wires. He guides our living in this world and, through that, prepares us for the world to come. Many are willing to follow only if they can be wowed, and spared the uncertainties and sufferings of tomorrow. But it doesn't work that way. We're traveling . . .

FROM HERE TO THERE, BUT NOT WITHOUT THE IN-BETWEEN

I. The Here.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (v. 1)

So, the question is: "Six days after what?" Well, it was six days after Jesus told the disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24) The "anyone" Jesus mentions - **anyone** would include...you...me. And then Jesus said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it (that is, whoever sets the Lord aside for whatever can be gained from the world), but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 16:25) And then the words that every disciple - all! - must weigh: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26)

Did you get the terms? Jesus was talking to disciples about the here and now. Here are the terms: "...deny himself...take up his cross...loses his life for my sake...gains the world (yet) forfeits his soul."

And note again, "led them up a high mountain by themselves." The mountain denotes a high place with the Lord. But, let's face it, getting up the high mountain can be labor intensive, strenuous. Sort of like life in the *here and now*.

Interesting, isn't it; how hard we labor to make this world solid and comfortable? We labor - climb mountains - for our "creature comforts". We grab for formulas to fulfill our want for more. We laugh at the idea of a fountain of youth, but our lives are filled with lotions and potions, pills and promises of a

youthful "old age". If some dusty character drove into town with a team of horses pulling a wagon selling a 50 cent bottle of sure-cure elixir, some of us would battle to be first in line. But we're still living in the decaying and dying here and now. Look at what happened when the disciples reached their destiny on the high mountain with Jesus . . .

II. The There.

(Jesus) led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." (vs.1-4)

First, he was "transfigured". He was changed. And more: "...his face shone like the sun...his clothes became white as light." What were the disciples seeing? They were seeing the glory of Christ! Jesus is God the Son. They saw what the Psalmist described: "O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment..." (Ps. 104:1-2) They saw what John would describe: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (I Jn. 1:5b)

Secondly, we're told "there appeared to them Moses and Elijah"; two Old Testament greats who were bodily present with the Lord. The disciples glimpsed, experienced, were in the presence of the glory of Heaven! Seriously, who wouldn't say, "'Lord, it is good that we are here... I will make three tents', and let's stay here...forever!"

Somehow, those earlier words of Jesus, "'take up his cross and follow me'", had faded into the background. The fact is these disciples had traveled from the "here"; that is, from the earthy and what that means for the followers of Christ - to the "there"; that is, the Heavenly!

Remember the words of the sermon Hymn: "'Tis good, Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain." Listen . . .

III. The In-Between.

"He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

"And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, 'Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.'" (vs.5-9)

What they saw on the mountain was to be a source of encouragement for them; that moment impressed upon them the eternal victory in Christ is certain. But not victory with this world! There is suffering in this still fallen world. There is cross bearing.

The fact is, the Father spoke from the cloud and said, "'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" Well pleased about what? Matthew reports, "From that time (before the Transfiguration) Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matt. 16:21) The Father is pleased that His Son would do everything necessary to secure our forgiveness and eternal life.

Those words, "For God so loved the world..." challenge our desire to rationalize our multitude of daily, un-numbered sins. God loved and loves us in spite of ourselves. Our love for Him is fractional and riddled with hideous thoughts and words and deeds. Yet He would give His Son to pay for that! And to believe that is to have everlasting life! Light! Glory forever!

The **In Between** is Christ's suffering and death for Sin. The **In Between** for us is also the **Here** - the **Now** - our walking, living, witnessing and dying in Christ. I have always appreciated Vance Havner's insight on this:

The early Christians did not transform the world, they transcended it. It was in later years, when (the Roman emperor) Constantine made a Christian profession easy and the church ceased looking for the Lord to return and began trying to build heaven on earth, that Christians became 'reasonable' and the world could live comfortably with them. But let it not be forgotten that a twice-born, Spirit-filled Christian is always a contradiction to this old world.

At the Mount of Transfiguration we learn that God doesn't jiggle wires to make things go. He prepared the disciples then and is preparing the disciples now to live for Him in this world. And, in Christ, our lives here overflow with promise: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6)

You see? From Here To There, But Not Without The In Between - **and never without the Presence of Christ's love**. We will meet with that this coming Ash Wednesday.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott