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Lesson: Mark 9:2-9 (Transfiguration of Our Lord)

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

If I could travel back to the time of Jesus, my initial thought is that I could tell the people so many things that would blow their minds. However, the more I think about it, I don't think my showing up back then would really matter in any significant way. Like, I would tell the people that we have automobiles that go a lot faster and further than even the Roman chariots. “That must be amazing! How do they work?” they would say.

“Uh... I don't know. Inside there is a bunch of metal, and... uh... the wheels turn with gasoline or a big battery.” They'd probably follow up by asking where this *gasoline* comes from, and the best I could say is “from the ground.” So then they'd start asking what a battery is and how it works, and I would just say, “Back up, back up, back up. There are these people called mechanics. People like me take our cars to the mechanics every few months, and the cars tend to work after that.” Then they'd say that mechanics must bear humanity's collective intelligence, and these mechanics must be as rich as kings, and I'd say, “You would

think that, but... no.” Growing suspicious of my claim to be from the future, the people would resort to asking me who the next emperor will be. “Phsh... I really don’t know.” I’ve come to the conclusion that if I showed up in Jesus’ day, I’d likely be less beneficial to them than I am to this day. Some people like to reverse this thought exercise, and have Jesus time-travel to today. I’m not sure how that would work out either. For instance, when Carrie Underwood sings *Jesus, Take the Wheel*. With all due respect, Ms. Underwood, Jesus has no experience with automobiles... at all. For everyone’s safety, let’s first have him practice for a week or two in an empty parking lot. Okay?

So if there were an exchange of people from one time to another, I’m not sure how earth-shattering it would be for anyone. All kidding aside, I think anyone from any time who happened to join Peter, James, and John on top of that mountain would be dumbfounded. No one can explain it. In the end, we would just have to agree that this is some type of holy mystery. It is a spiritual reality breaking into our own reality. “How” is a question no one will ever be able to answer, but I think we can get closer to the answer of “why.”

There is this thing in Mark’s gospel called the Messianic Secret. In Mark, Jesus is constantly telling people not to tell others about who he really is. He does it after healing a man with leprosy. After Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. When the demons time and again publicly shout that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus quickly silences them. And today, we have the transfiguration of Jesus: his clothes become a dazzling white, Moses and Elijah make cameo appearances, and a voice from heaven is heard. Yet, we are told that Jesus “orders” them to tell no one about this whole incident, until after he has been risen from the dead. Why wait until the resurrection? Why have this Messianic secret? It’s because the Messiah cannot be fully known without the cross.

If you tell people after healings, the people will know the Messiah as a healer. If you tell people after the exorcisms, the people will know the Messiah as an exorcist. If you tell people after the Transfiguration, the people will know the Messiah as the culmination of the

Law and the prophets. But, if you wait until the cross to reveal the Messiah, then the people will know that the Messiah offers salvation. As the Messianic Secret theme evolves from chapter to chapter, another theme in Mark's gospel emerges as well: the theme of "What is true discipleship?" What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus? The messianic theme and the discipleship theme go hand in hand, because Mark defines discipleship with the cross as well.

This week, we will embark on the journey of Lent. I like to think that there are two lights that shine on the Lenten journey. First, there is the light of today: Transfiguration Sunday. The light that this day provides offers all travelers on the Lenten journey a glimpse at the glory of Christ. And, of course, the second light is the glory that awaits at the other end of the Lenten journey: Easter. It's as if on this Transfiguration Sunday we are on a mountain, looking out over the valley of Lent, and we are able to see the glory of Easter on the other side. But we can't just jump from here to there, skipping the valley in between. Deciding to stay on this mountain of Transfiguration isn't an option either, because this is just a temporary glimpse. Like Christ, we have to go through this valley. Discipleship is about taking up our cross and following him.

Someone named Father Greg comes to mind when I think of disciples who are willing to carry their cross. In the 1980s, Father Greg was a priest in a Los Angeles Catholic parish. The later 80s into the 90s is known as "the decade of death" in Los Angeles, because of the surge of gang activity during those years. The law enforcement tactics and criminal justice policies of that time involved suppressing the people and mass incarceration in order to combat gang activity. Father Greg prayed about the situation in his community, which was the hotbed of gang activity. He took a different approach than the government officials. He believed that first and foremost the gang members needed to be treated as human beings. In 1988, he began to recruit gang members to join him for job training, and Father Greg slowly built his reputation with the gangs. His unofficial motto became "the best way to stop a

bullet is with a job.” Father Greg’s ministry – now called Homeboy Industries – has grown through the years. It offers a wide-range of free services. At any given time there are 250 individuals who are full-time active participants in the Homeboy Industries gang-intervention program, and over 10,000 people a year take part in some aspect of the services that Homeboy Industries offers. It is one of the largest, most comprehensive, and most successful gang intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry programs in the country. Pastor Ginger and I have toured there and have spoken with some of its participants. It is very impressive, but what is most important about Homeboy Industries is that it is rooted in the effort of taking up the cross of discipleship and following Jesus, so that Christ’s healing and salvation can take root in practical ways in this world.

That is one big example, but there are numerous ways that disciples of Jesus take up the cross each day, though they may not make the headlines. I’ve seen plenty of it here at All Saints. You see, the temptation for us is to wait it out on the mountain of Transfiguration. To say that we are fine with a glimpse of the reality of Christ. What this world needs, though, is more than a glimpse. It needs a savior who travels to the cross... and beyond. It needs disciples of Jesus to not be satisfied with a glimpse, but to take up our crosses and follow Jesus into this world. Disciples like Father Greg. Disciples like you and me. Although taking up our cross can seem to be a daunting task, we should remember that Christ always carries that cross with us. Christ can bring his glory to our crosses. The glory of God is fully realized with the cross of Christ. Unlike my time traveling, that glory has no problem making an impact whenever or wherever it appears. The people 2000 years experienced that glory; you and I experience that glory; the participants of Homeboy Industries experience that glory. So as we witness the light of Christ on this Day of Transfiguration, this is only the beginning of the journey. Let the light of this day shine on the Lenten path that is ahead of us, leading us to ultimately see the full glory of Christ that awaits on the other side.

Amen.