

MONDAY, 3/18

Read Matthew 17:1.

Matthew launches into the story of Jesus' transfiguration with some proper context. He says, "After six days" Jesus took a few of His disciples onto a mountain. It is appropriate for us to ask, six days after what? The answer to that lies in the stories preceding it in Matthew 16. If you glance up a few verses, we will see the stories of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus beginning to talk about His death and resurrection, which is followed by Peter's rebuke of Jesus. It's important for us to be aware of the context as we move into the story. Context always allows us to draw more meaning from the text.

We find that Jesus doesn't take the Twelve; instead, He takes what is often called the "inner circle" of disciples. The inner circle is made up of Peter, James, and John. The reason they are called the inner circle is that these three disciples are invited into several experiences with Jesus that the other disciples were not privy to. This story is a great example. They are invited to follow Jesus up a "high mountain."

While the precise mountain is up for debate, the site where this moment is captured best is near Jericho on the edge of the desert, not too far from Jerusalem. The truth, however, is we don't really know which mountain it is.

You might be wondering why Jesus is taking these three disciples high up a mountain. Did Jesus like to hike? Perhaps, but that isn't why Jesus takes them there. Jesus takes them there in order to reveal Himself to them.

In the Bible, mountains were places of revelation. When God appeared to Moses in a bush, it was on the slopes of Mount Horeb. On Mount Carmel, Elijah called down fire from heaven to make God's power known. We see mountains show up in the Gospels when Jesus fed the crowds. Mountains also appear in the book of Revelation. Mountains are places of significant revelation.

The prime example of this is Mount Sinai, where God gives Moses and His people the Law. God had just delivered the people from Egypt by splitting the Red Sea. He led the people to the mountain to set up camp. There Moses went on the mountain to be with the Lord where He gave Moses His commands that would shape the lives of His people and make them a distinct community. This would be considered among the Israelites as the most significant revelation of God to them.

I think we get how mountains play such a vital role in revelation. Mountains are majestic in and of themselves. Standing at the foot of a mountain opens us up to the idea that we are small. It humbles us, which paves the way to see the world in a way we can easily miss when we so easily become the focus in our day-to-day living.

While we may not have any accessible mountains around us, we still can call on the Lord to reveal Himself to us. We can pray that He would open our eyes to His glory and majesty. We can ask Him to help us encounter His goodness and faithfulness. Jesus promises that those who seek Him will find Him, so let us call on the name of the Lord.

Praying Together:

"Father, we ask You to make Yourself known to us. Wherever we are in our journey of faith, open our eyes to who and how great You are. Amen."

TUESDAY, 3/19

Read Matthew 17:2.

The moment of revelation was upon the three disciples as Jesus was transfigured before them. The Greek word translated as transfigured here is *metamorphoo*, where we get the word metamorphosis from. It means to transform or change.

So, what was Jesus changed into? That is a good question. The description we are given is that "His face shone like the sun" and "His clothes became as white as the light." Both of these actions point to the divine, or God's power and presence falling upon someone.

Let's look at the first example, Jesus' face shining like the sun. This sight would have made the mind of any Israelite go back to one famous figure in scripture: Moses. Exodus 34:29 tells us that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after being with the Lord for 40 days, "He was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord." Moses' face reflected the brilliance of God's glory that he had enjoyed. In fact, Moses had to cover his face when visiting with people because it shone so brightly. He removed the veil only when he was in God's presence.

So this is to say that Jesus' disciples would have immediately recognized what was happening. This event was inspired by God. God was doing something awesome right before their very eyes.

The other description was that Jesus' clothes "became as white as the light." This would have made them think about Daniel 7:9. This passage speaks to the appearance of One dubbed the Son of Man. This figure was human yet somehow mysteriously linked with the divine. He assumed a throne over all creation. As he sat on his throne, "his clothing was as white as snow."

Now we have seen throughout Matthew, even in our brief dive into the gospel, Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man. That is Jesus' favorite reference for Himself in the gospel. The Son of Man emphasizes Jesus' humanity while also, like the figure in Daniel, holding to His unique authority as an agent of God. There is a lot of mystery around the Son of Man, which might be something Jesus appreciated about the name.

What we can gather from this event so far is that Jesus' glory is being revealed. For both Moses in Exodus and the Son of Man in Daniel, their radiance was the reflection of God upon them. Here, the story tells us that Jesus radiates His own glory. His glory emerges before the Father enters the story. This is intentional. God is making a declaration about who Jesus is to the three disciples. Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man. He reflects the Father's glory and yet in Himself possesses the same glory. This revelation is a gift and one the disciples get to behold.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are full of glory. We have experienced something of Your glory and goodness. We acknowledge You as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. You are both fully divine and fully human. You are one of us and yet uniquely distinct from us. We offer You our praise. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 3/20

Read Matthew 17:3-4.

As if this scene weren't already enough for Peter, James, and John to comprehend, now two more people emerge onto the scene: Moses and Elijah. Now what are these two Old Testament greats doing here? Let's take a look at what this might mean.

Moses, as we looked at in Monday's WayPoint, was the one to whom God gave the Law on Mount Sinai. The Law was God's commands for His people. Because God revealed them to Moses when he communed with God on the mountain, Moses became linked to the Law.

Elijah was a prophet in the Old Testament. Prophets were to serve as mouthpieces for God, delivering His messages to the world around them. He was the chief prophet and known for being a forerunner to the Messiah.

The appearance of these two figures with Jesus symbolize the Law and the prophets, which sum up the message of the Old Testament that has led us to this very moment in the Gospel story. If you were to capture God's movement toward His people in the Old Testament as succinctly as possible, you could do no better than simply saying the Law and the prophets. Each of these served to make God and His will known to His people.

So why have the Law and the prophets shown up here on the mountain with Jesus? It is likely to state emphatically that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and prophets. Moses and Elijah have come to give witness to the One in whom their message is made complete. The Law and the prophets both anticipated Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus often drew upon both the Law and the prophets in His ministry, showing the people how they pointed to Him.

Peter, who is wrapped up in the moment, speaks before he thinks. He asks Jesus if it is fitting to build three shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It is a nice gesture, but it misses the point of the moment. We get why Peter would want to stay on that mountaintop moment. We often want to set up shop in the mountaintop moments of life, but it isn't to be. Neither is it to be for them to stay together on the mountain. Jesus has a job to do. He must go to Jerusalem, be rejected, killed, and raised.

While it might have been tempting for Jesus to remain in such a moment, He was ready to embrace the cross. It is why He came. He was ready to reveal His glory on another mountain, Mount Calvary.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You are the fulfillment of the greatest hopes of the Law and the prophets. You accomplished what they could not, which is to bring us salvation. We put our trust and cast all our hopes upon You, our Messiah. Amen."

THURSDAY, 3/21

Read Matthew 17:5.

One way to know that your words aren't helpful is when God interrupts you. That's what happens to Peter.

As Peter was offering to build a trio of condos, God chimes in, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

Now these words of affirmation from the Father to His Son might sound familiar to you. They are the same words God extended to Jesus at His baptism in Matthew 3. As Jesus came out of the

waters, the voice from heaven boomed, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

These words of identity and belonging were what Jesus took with Him into the wilderness when the enemy questioned if He were really the Son of God. These words had carried Jesus through temptation and through the trials He faced in His ministry. Now, with a new trial on the horizon in the cross, the Father saw it fitting to bestow these words upon His Beloved Son once again.

There is one thing in God's address to His Son here at the Transfiguration that doesn't appear at His baptism. God adds the message, "Listen to Him!" What might that mean? I think it means we ought to listen to Jesus.

What God is saying here is that His Son has authority, so when He tells the disciples about His rejection, death, and resurrection, they must listen to Him. They should not question Him but rather come alongside Him. They are to be a support, not a stumbling block. They are to embrace what He has come to do rather than resist it. They are to heed His words and trust in Him rather than succumb to fear.

With this being said, we can see how the disciples struggle to truly listen to Jesus. They falter and flee from His side. Rather than trusting, they turn from Him. They deny Him instead of demonstrating their commitment to Him.

Like the twelve disciples, we often struggle to listen to Jesus. I wonder how often we take Jesus' words as suggestions for our lives rather than commands. We hear the call to forgive, but we choose to be obstinate rather than obedient. We hear that we are to love and pray for our enemies, yet we immediately brush it off as impossible. We encounter the call to go out as Jesus' witnesses, yet we choose silence over sharing the Good News. We are not unlike the twelve disciples in that way. God, break our hard hearts. Give us ears to hear and hearts that are freed for obedience.

This charge to listen to Jesus is a further reminder of our need, as disciples, for God's grace. We need grace when we fail to listen as we should. We need that grace to forgive and restore us. We also need grace as power to listen. We need the grace of God that not only mends our faults but also empowers us for faithful living. Grace doesn't just minister to our sins; it also moves us toward likeness to Jesus.

So let us call on God's grace to be at work in us, both to heal us where we have fallen short and empower us toward faithful future actions.

Praying together:

"God, we are in constant need of Your grace, and You are always willing to pour out upon us the grace we need. Forgive us when we choose not to listen to Jesus' words. May Your grace minister to the brokenness in us that keeps us from following You. May Your power break through so that we will choose to listen and obey You. May Your grace at work in us pave the way for a different future. Break old patterns and disobedient ways. Forge a new path, a new life for us. In Jesus' name. Amen."

FRIDAY, 3/22

Read Matthew 17:6-8.

This is a lot for the disciples (Peter, James and John) to take in. In the last few verses, the transfigured Jesus and two of the most well-regarded Jewish leaders of their time (Elijah and

Moses) showed up. They were there to represent the shift in leadership from the past to the future based on the impact of prophecy (Elijah) and the Law (Moses). They were Jesus' predecessors. Though they do not know it yet, the disciples would be a big part of the future ministry.

Just as their brains were trying to process this shift in leadership, suddenly a bright cloud appeared, and the big and booming voice of God resounded in their ears, declaring that Jesus is His beloved Son with whom God is pleased and to listen to what He is saying. At the sound of God's voice, the disciples dropped to the ground in awe and in fear. What is so special about these circumstances that God would speak truth into them? Why here? Why now? These are significant times of historical, current, and future change.

Upon Jesus' death, He will have paid for the sins of all humanity, past, present and future. All sins will have been forgiven, yet none of us deserves the fullness and timeless forgiveness represented here. Jesus is the great fulfillment of prophecy and the greatest fulfillment of the Law. As God's Son, Jesus grants us an abundance of grace so that we can make the wrong right again, heal the brokenness left behind when sins persist, and remove evil to replace it with good. Only by the grace of God through Christ are we given the power to overcome sin and the brokenness caused by it.

Forgiveness of sin is so powerful that it required the prophets to predict it centuries in advance. It required Moses to establish the Law 1,000 years in advance for it to be in place and practiced by the time of Christ, so He could frame sin in context of our relationships with others in a community.

So, of course, the disciples are afraid of God's massive presence, just as Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds were afraid when facing a messenger of God (i.e., angels). Humans are not used to being exposed to God's Presence so boldly and intentionally. And just like the others, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." Jesus invited them to stand and face Him. As they looked around, Elijah and Moses were gone. All they could see was Jesus standing there. So they took a moment to realize what they had just witnessed before standing up.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we desire to know You better. Show us the path upon which You want us to walk. Help us become the disciples Jesus needs us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen."

SATURDAY, 3/23

Read Matthew 17:9.

It does not matter what the disciples (Peter, James, John) have seen Jesus do before. Transfiguration was unexpected and confusing to them. Walking away from what they saw, they tried to make sense of it all. Jesus meant for them to see His glory. He wanted His closest disciples to see Elijah and Moses. God's voice was overwhelming but reassuring that everything would be all right, and that it is all right to trust Jesus post-transfiguration.

After Jesus changed back into his old self, He and His closest three disciples headed down the mountain, quietly considering all they had seen and heard. It was then that Jesus requested that they not tell anyone until after He has died and been resurrected. But why?

Not only did they have an amazing experience, but they also wanted to shout it from the rooftops. They wanted to brag and tell their version of the story. After all, this was the experience of a lifetime! But we also have to remember what Jesus is trying to accomplish. First, this is about

God's reconnecting with His people. The miracles Jesus performed were not about Him but about what God is doing within each of their lives. Secondly, Jesus knows that He has to slow the stories' being told so that He will not get arrested too soon. There still needs to be more groundwork laid so that humanity can move closer to God when Jesus returns to heaven.

He showed his closest disciples the plain and fantastic truth so that they could be convinced that Jesus is truly God's Son. He needed them to be well informed and able to support His ministry after He is gone.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we believe in You. Teach us to share Your love and Your truth in such a way that people can believe who You are and what You can do in each person's life. Show us the best way to reveal who You are to others so that each can understand You best. In Jesus' name, Amen."

SUNDAY, 3/24

Read Matthew 17:10-13.

The disciples did not understand why they could not tell everyone about what they had seen. Jesus asked the disciples to keep it under wraps until He is raised from the dead. In an effort to understand the circumstances, the disciples began comparing what they had seen and what they knew from scripture. Jesus has confirmed that the teaching about the prophecy is true. It is found in Malachi 4: 5-6, which reads, "Behold, I will send you, Elijah the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with the decree of utter destruction."

Jesus acknowledges the importance of Elijah's return to restore order. He also told them that Elijah has already returned and no one recognized him or his mission. Elijah suffered at the hands of those who misunderstood him. He was successful in leading many in Israel to repentance (Luke 1:17). However, his work ended with rejection by Israel's religious leaders and execution by Israel's political leadership (Matthew 14:1-12). Jesus admitted that He will suffer the same fate (Isaiah 53:3-6) for the same reasons as Elijah. In this narrative, Elijah was John the Baptist.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we have seen John pave the way for Jesus, and still die at the hands of jealous men. The same fate will later await our Savior Jesus. We see the suffering and what can we do differently so that their mission becomes our mission. Strengthen us to the task. Embolden us so that we may reach new people for Christ in Your way and in Your time, Jesus. Amen."