

## Lesson 29 Luke 9:28-36

**The Transfiguration: A Taste of the Kingdom**

June 21, 2009

**Introduction**

On Friday this week Barb & I took advantage of an opportunity to go to Port Renfrew for the day where I went fishing with Bob & Neil while Heartha & Barb enjoyed a day by the beach. After fishing I had the opportunity to sit by myself on the beach for a short period of time and watch the waves crashing in on the shore. (Very therapeutic, by the way...) It was fascinating to watch the wave action pushing pieces of driftwood around. For a while the waves simply play with the wood, tossing it up then drawing it back into to foam and the froth of the breaking waves. Then a big wave will come along and throw the piece of wood high up onto the beach, but not quite far enough to stay and so it starts rolling back down toward the water but then just when you think it will retreat back into the deep another even larger wave crashes in, picks up that piece of driftwood to casts it far enough onto the beach that it lodges into a dry bit of sand as the water retreats.

I feel like this passage before us today is like one of these 2<sup>nd</sup> waves. Last week's passage was the first wave. For the past several weeks we have noticed this issue of the identity of Jesus begin tossed around and 'coming towards shore'. In our text last Sunday, the identity of Jesus is finally nailed to the shore with Peter's great declaration, 'You are the Christ of God'. Now at last, that which has been building as hope in the minds of the disciples has been stated and accepted. Jesus is the promised Messiah!

We might be excused, however, for having some doubts about the authority of this statement by Peter. After all, he was rather impulsive with his mouth and often was getting himself in trouble. Can we really trust his words as to the true identity of this person Jesus?? Like a mighty second wave (more like a tsunami really) comes our text for today. Luke has gone to the highest possible authority as He brings God Himself into the picture.

Thomas Martin suggests: *"When the implied author brings God into the Gospel's conversation, it is to expose the reader to the most authoritative voice possible. Thus, finally, in the theophanic cloud of 9.35,*

*the voice of God trumps all others, bringing the issue to a conclusion, a final answer: 'It's my Son, listen up!'”<sup>1</sup>*

It is my deep prayer that by observing this amazing text together that your faith and my faith will be made stronger. I pray that we might go out from here having a greater sense of confidence that Jesus is One whom I can trust fully and completely even though the circumstances of life are very complicated and unstable.

I want us to learn the lesson that Peter obviously did! Even though, as we will see, Peter is once again guilty of speaking before thinking, he really does learn a highly significant lesson from this incident.

Turn to 2 Peter 1:16-19:

*16We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.*

*19And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

Are you in a dark place today? More questions than answers? My prayer is that the light of Jesus as seen in this account that we call Transfiguration will shine brightly and bring hope and courage to your life today.

### **Reading with Observations**

Luke 9:28-36

**28About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.**

1. “After 8 days...” By writing this Luke is tying this event directly to the preceding one. We are still very much concerned about this question of identity – ‘who do people say I am’; who do you say I am’?
2. “he took Peter, John & James...” We have seen already in chapter 9 that Jesus is focusing his thoughts and attention on the 12. Here he is investing even more deeply into these 3. These are the

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas W. Martin, “What Makes Glory Glorious? Reading Luke's Account of the Transfiguration Over Against Triumphalism” JSNT 29.1 (2006) 3-26, p. 13

same ones who were allowed into the room when Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead at the end of chapter 8.

- a. I believe we may observe something about Jesus here: He was very concerned that the truly miraculous events were witnessed only by a select few. He did not come to wow the world with His miraculous abilities – He came to 'seek and save the lost'. He is modeling here that the Kingdom of God is not about power and authority but about service and reconciliation. However, it was important that a few key individuals were indeed able to bear witness to Jesus' ability to raise the dead, and here in this instance it was critical that some key individuals were witnesses to this 'out-of-the-ordinary' declaration by God Himself as to the identity of Jesus. Why Peter, John & James?? We don't really know – except we do know that they play a highly strategic role in the establishment of the church later on after Jesus has gone away.
3. "went up to a mountain to pray" Here we go again! We have observed that Jesus always prays before significant events – here He is preparing His heart for what is to come!
    - a. We should also notice that the imagery of going up a mountain often involves going to meet with God – remember Moses at Mt. Sinai, for example.

***29As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.***

1. Even before the mention of Moses we can observe a strong OT flavour in the picture that is being drawn here. What happened when Moses went up a mountain to talk with God? His face shone so that he had to cover it when he came down. The OT imagery in this whole picture of Transfiguration is very strong.
2. Significance of Moses & Elijah:
  - a. What is Moses most well known for in the OT story?
    - i. Law, exodus, confronting Pharaoh
  - b. What is Elijah most known for?
    - i. Often considered the greatest prophets; confronted one of the most evil kings and his more evil wife
  - c. Another note of interest – neither of them died 'normal, human deaths'.

- d. In broad categories, then, we may say that Moses represents Law while Elijah represents the Prophets. They represent the 2 primary ways in which God has communicated with His people up until this point – through the giving of the Law and the sending of His prophets.
- e. In this sense this event becomes not only a fulcrum in the book of Luke but a pivotal point in the whole of God’s way of dealing with mankind – from this point onwards, God will deal with mankind through the life and work of His Son!
  - i. Hebrews 1:1-2: *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”*
- f. We may therefore view the event of Transfiguration as a ‘passing of the baton’ – up until now God has spoken through the Law and the Prophets; from now on He will speak through His Son

### 3. Significance of their conversation

- a. *“They spoke about His departure...”* The word ‘departure’ is the word *exodus*.
  - i. Moses had confronted the evil powers of Egypt and had led God’s people to the desert
  - ii. Elijah had confronted evil powers within Israel itself and sought to keep the people of God serving Him faithfully
  - iii. Jesus will now lead the ultimate Exodus – He will confront and defeat the ultimate powers of sin and darkness and will make a way for people of all the nations of the world to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. He will do all of that by going through rejection, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem.

***32Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)***

1. “Peter & his companions are sleepy...” From our perspective we might find it easy to be hard on Peter and the others for sleeping at such a momentous time in history! Two things to remember: they did not have the advantage of historical perspective; there is a good chance that this was an all night experience (note verse 37 – ‘the next day...’).
2. “They saw His glory...” What must this have been like?? We can only imagine from how the text describes the scene – Jesus with his face and clothes brighter than lightning; Moses & Elijah appear

in glorious splendour! This for Peter, John & James was a brief taste of the glory of the untainted kingdom of God!

3. Peter wants to hang onto what he sees! “Let us put up 3 shelters...” This is one of those classic cases where Peter is guilty of putting his foot in his mouth! Even the text itself tells us that he didn’t have a clue what he was speaking about! Let us simply observe for now that his impulsive response is one that ones to hang on to whatever it was that he saw as He watched Jesus conversing with Moses & Elijah. We will come back to the whole concept of glory in this passage in a few minutes.

**34While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.**

1. C.S. Lewis, in his little book entitled *Miracles* argues that we may classify miracles in 2 categories: "*miracles of the old creation*" and "*miracles of the new creation.*" "*Miracles of the old creation*" are those events in which God does close and small, suddenly and locally, what He does everyday through the whole process of the natural order, but on a scale so grand that no one much notices. For example, when Jesus heals a leper, he's not violating the laws of nature, he's focusing them, concentrating them, localizing them...
2. "*Miracles of the new creation,*" Lewis says, are those epiphanies, those "*metaphor moments*" when a New World "*breaks through*" revealing itself. Another world, Transcendence itself, is pulled like a blanket over ordinary time and ordinary history and then, from time-to-time, spikes down through it revealing itself and thereby transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.”<sup>2</sup>
3. In this miracle, the God who is outside of time breaks into the world of time in a way that is highly unusual, though not unseen.
4. I would suggest that this is the 4<sup>th</sup> time we have seen it happen in Luke’s account.
  - a. He did it with a special message to Zechariah – this was a message about the identity of John as the forerunner of Messiah
  - b. Later He visits Mary – the key message is the identity of the One who was to come
  - c. He did it at the baptism of Jesus. The point? To make the identity of Jesus clear – ‘You are my Son...’
  - d. Here at the Transfiguration – the point once again is all about the identity of Jesus

---

<sup>2</sup> Lewis quoted in: R. Wayne Stacey, “Glimpses of Glory: Luke 9:28-36” Review and Expositor, 99, Winter 2002 p. 85

5. And so we see a powerful pattern here – each time the eternal God breaks into the human world in this way it is to reassure whoever is close by that Jesus truly is the Messiah, the Anointed One who comes into the world to bring redemption and salvation.

[blank screen here]

In the minutes remaining I want to briefly reflect on 2 questions that seem to be evident in this outstanding passage:

Who does God say Jesus is?

What is Glory?

1. Who does God say Jesus is?

a. Notice the words God uses to introduce Jesus:

- i. “This is my Son” – back at the time of Jesus baptism the words were directed to Jesus (You are My Son); now the words are directed at Peter, John & James – This is My Son!
  1. It is hard for us to imagine the magnitude of this moment for these 3 disciples.
  2. These words from God seem to come in direct response to Peter’s mistaken suggestion that he should build 3 booths for Jesus, Moses & Elijah.
  3. It seems that God is breaking into history here in such dramatic fashion in order to clearly and unequivocally show that this person Jesus is NOT on the same level as Moses & Elijah – He is the One God claims as His own – He is MY SON.
- ii. “Whom I have chosen” – Luke is the only one that uses the word *chosen*. What’s going on here?
  1. God wanted these 3 individuals to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was someone to be believed in and trusted fully. He is the Chosen One, the Anointed One of God; the Redeemer of Israel as promised in the OT.
- iii. “Listen to Him!” We don’t have time to go into detail on this, but let me recommend a study to you. Take the word ‘listen’ and ‘hear’ and do a study to see how it is emphasized in Luke. Over and over again you will discover the emphasis on listening carefully with a readiness to obey = hearing and doing.

1. Our 3 friends here obviously did listen – even though they didn’t get it right away, they would later be pillars in the fledgling church.
  2. And so we remind ourselves of the words Peter wrote later: *“We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* (2 Pet. 1:18-19)
    - b. And so, in light of the overwhelming evidence that this text gives us about the identity of Jesus, the challenge comes down to you and me – “Listen to Him”. Pay attention to Him in your day to day life. He is trustworthy. To miss out on relationship with Jesus is to miss out on life itself. This is the overwhelming theme of this key passage.
    - c. But there is one more theme the surfaces which I believe to be important to notice here.
2. What is Glory?
- d. Within the discussion about the identity of Jesus there are many allusions to glory and we need to be sure not to miss the thread.
    - i. What Luke is trying to tell us is that glory in the Kingdom of God looks different than we might think.
  - e. In our story here we see it in the faux pas that Peter makes when he wakes up from his sleepiness and sees Jesus in all his glory talking with Moses and Elijah who likewise appear in ‘glorious splendour’.
    - i. The real mistake that Peter makes is to jump to the conclusion that glory in the Kingdom is always about the bright, shiny radiance that seems to come upon those who come close to the presence of Almighty God.
    - ii. It is this bright, shiny glory that Peter tries to capture as he blurts out his totally out of place comment about building booths. He didn’t want the picture to come to an end, ever!
  - f. As Thomas Martin points out, however, *“Jesus’ true glory is not articulated brightness to be captured in the verbal photograph of 9.29. His true glory is instead hidden in the dark mysterious cloud out of which emanates the voice of God. And Jesus when he emerges from the cloud is alone and very normal. This is the Jesus God commands us to listen to.”*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin, p. 20.

- i. And so the glory of Jesus observed by only these 3 privileged disciples in all its dazzling brightness is only one small piece of the glory that is displayed by Jesus. Most of the glory goes unnoticed – it is Jesus, looking very ordinary but displaying the glory of God by delivering a boy from demons, by restoring sight to the blind, healing the leper.
- g. Donald Luther says it this way: *“The glory of God is the paradoxical opposite of all human glory: light revealed in darkness, triumph through defeat, greatness expressed in lowliness, freedom expressed in obedience, life through death. Jesus entered the way of suffering, and exactly in that way he entered, expressed, revealed the heart, the glory of the self-giving God.”*<sup>4</sup>

The Apostle John was one of the 3 on the mountain that day. If you read John’s writing you will discover that John clearly picked up this message about glory looking very different that we might think. In his gospel account he speaks much about the whole concept of glory. Listen to how he quotes Jesus talking about glory in John 12.

*“23Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

As we come to the Table of Communion let us remind ourselves that this bread and wine remind us of a place that on a human level is a place of misery and torture and yet paradoxically it was the place where the glory of God is made known in a more powerful and profound way than we can imagine.

Thomas Martin:

*If the context Luke sets for the church's expectations of glory is laid out in the Transfiguration, this humiliated glory is to continue to do good when few recognize it as glorious. Such glory is to continue to minister in the midst of miscomprehension (v. 41). It is to assume the very un-glorious burden of working with mental disease (v. 42). It is to embrace humiliation (v. 44). Greatness is to never have authority. Glory is to be the least glorious slave of all (v. 48c). It allows the other to act independently (v. 50). A truly powerful majesty never seeks revenge or coercion (v. 55). A humiliated glory is homeless (v. 58b) and without the security of human bonding (v. 60a). Glory is, in the end (now and apocalyptically), nothing that we have been led to believe it is. It eschews triumphalism and, instead, embraces humility, not as a tool to achieve triumph, but as glory's very essence.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Donald J. Luther, “The Mystery of the Transfiguration” *Word & World, Volume XXI, Number 1 Winter 2001*, p. 5

<sup>5</sup> Martin, p. 22