

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“A FAITH EXPERIENCE”  
February 22, 2009  
Mark 9:2-9  
8:45 A.M. Service**

Our text for today focuses on the mountains. Climbing mountains can often be a harrowing experience, particularly for those who are serious climbers. High winds, unexpected storms--one should never underestimate the risks involved in climbing the world's higher mountains, no matter how experienced one may be.

Climbers are susceptible to frostbite as well as brain swelling and delirium. Delirious climbers have been known to strip off their clothing in the icy winds, or simply walk off the side of the mountain.

Be careful if you take up mountain climbing. It obviously has great risks as well as great rewards. Jesus once asked his closest disciples--Peter, James and John--to join him on a hike up a mountain. We have no evidence that it was a harrowing climb--it was not Mt. Everest and it was not Pikes Peak, but what happened on the top of that mountain was unnerving.

It had been a very busy week for Jesus and his disciples. The disciples witnessed their Master feed a multitude of people with just a few loaves and fishes. They then saw him give vision to a man who was, for all practical purposes, blind. Then he revealed to them his mission as the Messiah and predicted his death and resurrection, and swore them to secrecy. Then, says Mark, *“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.”*

It's nice imagery, if you think about it. Peter, James and John--vigorous young men, maybe in their early twenties--following their young rabbi, only

about 31 or 32 himself--climbing up this tall mountain. It was probably great fun and fellowship. Like young men everywhere, they were probably competitive about the climb. They probably teased the one who brought up the rear. **“Look at me,”** one of them would have shouted, as he climbed out on a steep ledge. These were healthy, fun-loving young men on a grand excursion.

Perhaps they were winded from the climb when they reached the top. If one of them suffered from acrophobia, a fear of heights, maybe he stayed back from the edge a little bit, resting uncomfortably on a rock. Some of you will identify with that. Though I really doubt that this group showed much fear. You're familiar with Peter's personality. He's the one who impetuously jumped out of the boat and tried to walk on the water like the Master. He seems to have had no fear--except on that night he denied Jesus. And as for James and John, remember they were called ***“the Sons of Thunder.”*** That's a name that Jesus gave them--probably for a good reason.

These were the three disciples whom Jesus was most comfortable with as he went about teaching and healing. These were also the three whom he trusted most with his mission of redeeming the world. So he invited them to climb with him up to a high mountain summit. Little did Peter, James and John realize what lay in store for them.

There they stood on the mountain when suddenly Jesus was ***“transfigured”*** right before their eyes. We don't know exactly what that means, but according to the Gospels, Jesus' ***“clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”***

Imagine that! His garments turned a dazzling white and Moses, the law-giver, and Elijah, the prophet, were brought back from the dead to talk with him. Jesus, their young teacher, was talking with these venerable historical figures face-to-face! What were Peter, James and John to make of all of this? Was it a dream? Were they hallucinating? Something was happening, that's for sure--the likes of which they had never experienced before.

Of course it was Simon Peter said who spoke up. ***“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here,”*** he said. ***“Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”*** Then Mark adds parenthetically that Peter ***“did not know what to say, they were so frightened.”*** Well, that's Peter for you!

You can bet they were frightened. Whatever was happening here was more than they could process.

Then, just as mysteriously, says Mark, *“a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*

My guess is that this was one command that was easy to carry out. After all, who would have believed them anyway? Only after Christ’s resurrection from the grave would this story have made sense. What does it all mean; this scene on the Mount of Transfiguration? Well, let’s take a look.

**In this story, we have an important witness of a faith experience. It is an important witness from the Old Testament.** Many mainline believers are not quite certain of some of the claims reported in the Bible.

This is one of the stories in the Bible that troubles many people. As Christians, we believe that Jesus revealed to us definitively the nature of God. And we believe that all scripture is to be interpreted in light of that revelation of who Jesus was and is. Therefore, as Christians, we can’t afford to skip over those passages of scripture that trouble us, even from the Old Testament. Our faith is built on the narratives from the entire Bible. Christ did not come to destroy the faith of his fathers, but to *“fulfill it.”* (Matthew 5:17) Christ came to bring new light to man’s understanding of God.

That is important for us in the midst of our celebration of Black History Month. We have come to know and appreciate the nature of God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

When the devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, each time Satan advanced a temptation, the Master answered with a verse from scripture (Matthew 4: 4-10). When he was asked about the great commandment, he quoted from Deuteronomy: *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (6:5).

So here we are on another Transfiguration Sunday with Jesus, in the presence of the prophet Elijah and Moses, up on the mountain...the Mount of

Transfiguration. Here we are with Jesus, on a faith experience that takes us to **“the very center of our faith.”**

Take notice how this Transfiguration story ends. After Elijah’s and Moses’ dramatic appearance, says Mark, just as mysteriously, **“a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.” That’s significant. Moses and Elijah had been with them, but now, “they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.”**

I invite you to see Jesus this morning as a part of your faith experience. Last week, many people came into our church and met Jesus. Maybe it was the cup of coffee, the lemonade, the cookies, or perhaps the friendly welcome. They were made to feel like children of God in a place where God has caused His name to dwell. God has given us His power and presence in His Son, Jesus Christ. As the voice said to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration: **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** That is the good news for today: Listen to Christ!

Come! Grow your spirit with us. I invite you to encounter your faith experience on this journey to the cross throughout the entire season of Lent. I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church!