



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“SHINE, JESUS, SHINE”

Scripture Lessons: Luke 9: 2-9

*This sermon was preached by Mary Robinson, on Sunday, February 19, 2023
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Luke 9: 2-9

and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, ‘Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.’ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Herod’s Perplexity

Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. Herod said, ‘John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?’ And he tried to see him.

PRAYER: Gracious God: Tell us what we need to hear and show us what we ought to do to obey Jesus Christ.

Why do people climb mountains?

Sir George Mallory says ---- “Because they are there.”

I asked several people why they like to climb mountains:

Some say, “for the view”, some say “to escape”, to retreat from the world down below”, some say, “to feel closer to God” and some enjoy the hike in nature.

Mountains have been a vital part of the Biblical story:

Noah’s ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah.

Moses encountered God on Mount Sinai where he also received the Decalogue. On Mt. Carmel the prophet Elijah challenged and defeated the prophets of Baal.

Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever on a mountain and it is even called, “the Sermon on the Mount”. Jesus would give his final words to his disciples, “The Great Commission” on a mountain. And, of course, we have today’s Biblical story of the Transfiguration, which some scholars believed took place on Mt. Tabor while others say it was Mt. Hermon. I think the content of the story is more important than the place of the story. Let’s not get bogged down in details and miss the glory.

This story seems simple enough yet so important that all three Synoptic Gospels as they are called – Matthew, Mark and Luke record it. All three Synoptic versions of this moment have as their “point” the

simple fact that Jesus is amazing, someone to be worshipped, gawked at, and one takeaway is to be lost in wonder, love and praise.

Let me set the context for us – Jesus has just told the disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to die. Peter, you will remember, said that he would not allow Jesus to die. Jesus was forced to rebuke Peter in front of all the others.

Jesus needed to get away, so he took his inner circle, Peter, James and John, with him and together they climbed the mountain to pray. As they were praying Jesus is transfigured – that is, he is transformed before their eyes.

The transfiguration story tells us that Jesus' face became radiant, and his clothes were dazzling white. Whiter than any bleach could ever make them. If that were not enough, two men, long dead, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. What could all this mean and what does God want us to know from this story?

It might help to know that many Biblical scholars believe this event took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. This festival was begun under the leadership of Moses and was one of the three pilgrimage festivals which required attendance by all males, twelve and older. Interestingly enough, the Feast of Tabernacles is the forerunner of the American Camp Meeting typified by weeklong camp meetings still held today by some denominations where whole families move to crudely built shelters for a week or so and have camp meetings often with fiery sermons each night along with old fashioned hymn songs and enjoy wonderful food and fellowship together, shutting out the rest of the world and focusing on the gospel.

At the time of Jesus, this festival had become focused on the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Earlier, when Peter sought to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die, he did so because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah and could not fall victim to death. This mountain top experience was designed to help the disciples see that indeed Jesus was the Messiah.

The only conceivable responses are recorded in Scripture. In Mark, Peter offers the greatest understatement in religious history: "It is good that we are here." Matthew 17:10 is even better: "And they fell on their faces in awe."

Moses was present to represent the Torah or the Law, and Elijah was present to represent the Prophets.

And of course, we know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about his forthcoming departure, or literally, in the Greek text, "exodus". Jesus was likened unto a new Moses who would deliver his people to the everlasting Land of Promise. Peter was so caught up in the Messianic moment believing that the kingdom was at hand, that he suggested setting up three dwellings, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He blurted this out without thinking, as all three disciples were stunned by what they were seeing. The point was not to stay on the mountain top and worship Jesus but to love and serve God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, as Jesus himself did with breathtaking completeness, difficult, exhausting, and frightening though it sometimes was. When we spend time with God, on a mountaintop or wherever, our faces should reflect the light of Christ and others will see Christ in us as we serve like He

did. Like Moses, when he came down the mountain and his face shone so bright that he had to wear a veil so people could look upon his face.

The Scripture then says that “suddenly” a light-radiant cloud enveloped them all, and from “deep in the cloud” a voice was heard saying: “This is my Son, listen to him.” When the Lord speaks to you, don’t just do something ... stand there. And listen.

The only remote takeaways from this might be two: first, to try to do the awe thing every day. To see Jesus in all His glory serving mankind. Second, as the voice from heaven(which echoes the voice at Jesus’ baptism) quite sensibly suggests, “Listen to him.” The guy who glowed, the one who is God and who healed and touched the untouchables and gave his life? Listen to this guy and not all the other pretenders who’ve frankly never glowed for a second.

This cloud was not an ordinary cloud like we see here as we drive the mountains on a foggy day. This cloud was like the cloud that overtook Moses on Mt. Sinai and like the cloud that led the Israelites to the Promised Land. It was the Shekinah glory of God cloud. Shekinah is a word to describe the physical manifestation of God on earth.

The disciples were stunned to say the least. There could be no doubt now that Jesus was the Messiah and that whatever Jesus said was absolutely true. Remember, he had told them that he would go to Jerusalem and there he would die.

The experience was so powerful that coming down from that mountaintop experience the disciples were quiet, until Jesus swore them to secrecy saying, “Don’t tell a soul what you saw. After the Son of Man rises from the dead, you’re free to talk.”

The disciples’ eyes had indeed been opened and they were able to see Jesus as he really is – and that is the nature of true worship – to see Jesus as he really is, as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the Savior of All who put their trust in him.

From time to time, we are given mountain top experiences where we become more aware, where our lives become more focused, where our hearts and minds are centered on the living reality of our Lord.

And just like Peter, James and John, we must come down the mountain into the ordinary world of day to day living.

Sir George Mallory, whose quote I opened this sermon with, was killed along with a companion as they tried to become the first to scale Mt. Everest back in 1924. Mallory’s remains were found a few years ago near the top of that great mountain, and the question remained, “did he make it to the top?” His son John Mallory has said that it doesn’t matter because in his opinion, the only way you achieve a summit is to come back alive. The job is only half done if you don’t come down again.”

What powerful words, even for us today. While we are given those glimpses of Jesus on the mountain top, our task is only half done if we do not come down the mountain and share the good news.

Our call is to take what we have seen and heard and share it with others.

So maybe we don’t need to climb a mountain to experience a transfiguration of Jesus. Maybe all we need to do is look into the character of Jesus as we know him in the stories about him in the Bible, in his words of penetrating truth, and in his death on the cross. If we gaze intently and openly, we will see him

transfigured into a being of divine glory. If we receive him, we will find ourselves transfigured into sons and daughters of God. And if we follow him and do his works, we will find our world transfigured into the realm of God. Let us pray that this may be so. AMEN