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FEBRUARY 14, 2021

MARK 9:2-9 (p. 820)

BLAINE

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Turn us towards your Radiant Face Lord! Unstop our ears, calm our minds, and settle our troubled hearts! Somehow, get our attention Lord, so that we will see your Smile, know your Heart, and truly fathom the Depths of your Love! We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"PIERCING THE VIEL"

I heard a Devotional years ago. I think it was at an Elder's meeting. And I think, it was Sarah Esper who shared it. It went something like this. Suppose that you are an "Extra" in an upcoming Hollywood Movie. You know, one of those momentary parts where you are somewhere in a crowd, or in the background of one particular scene, when the camera quickly flashes past.

You would probably scrutinize that scene when you saw it, wouldn't you? In fact, every time that you saw it! You'd watch that one scene intently, over and over again, where hundreds of people are milling about, just waiting for that "two-fifths of a second" when you can see the back of your head! Maybe your family would too? Maybe even your closest friends? Maybe? But no one else would get excited about your "two-fifths of a second", would they? They probably wouldn't even realize it was you. Even if you told them, most people wouldn't care! So, how could you then, ever think that Movie was about you?"

Today, is Transfiguration Sunday! Today, we wrap up the season of Epiphany in the Church! And today, both of our texts tell us about Epiphanies! There is a lot going on. Maybe you noticed? An Epiphany, if you recall, is an “Aha Moment”! When we “get it”! When we see the truth! Often, in a dramatic way! When we notice the true Star of the story! An Epiphany is a glimpse of God, the whole point of Creation! And I’m wondering if we might see ourselves. As an “Extra”. In one particular, “two-fifths of a second” scene.

In our Gospel lesson, Mark tells us of Jesus going up onto a Mountain, and standing in the Presence of God! There, His appearance is changed! But more importantly, His true identity is revealed! The Disciples look on with Awe! I’m sure we would too! And Peter tries to find something to do! That may sound familiar as well!

And in our Old Testament lesson, approximately nine hundred years earlier, Elisha watches as his Mentor, Elijah, is taken up into Heaven in a Whirlwind! Riding in a Chariot of Fire, drawn by Horses of Fire! Imagine what an experience like that would have been like!

What would you do if you were there? In either place? Or better yet, afterwards? I mean, God’s Power, God’s Presence, has been dramatically revealed, right before your eyes! The Star of the Movie steps onto Center Stage, just as the Curtain goes up! What would that be like?

I love Epiphanies! And my absolute favorite description for one is “God Momentarily Piercing the Veil that Separates Heaven and Earth”! So, what is it like to briefly “Peer through the Veil” and “Stand in the Presence of God”? Have you ever done that? Have you ever Touched the Divine, experienced the Lord’s Majesty and Awe, first hand? How should one respond to an experience like that?

Elisha watched as his Mentor, Elijah, rolled up his cloak and struck the waters of the Jordan River, parting them to the left and the right, just like Moses did at the Red Sea! Then this Prophetic Protege watched, along with fifty other Prophets, as Elijah was taken up into Glory, right before him! What would you do after that? If you were one of the fifty prophets, an “Extra”, what would you do?

We’re told that Elisha tore his clothes, presumably in grief over the loss of his Mentor. But then it says, “Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak”, the very one Elijah had used to part the waters, and then Elisha did the very same thing! Does that address the question? After witnessing the Glory of God, or even seeing the Glory of God shine through someone else, what’s the next step?

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up onto a Mountain to pray. These are three of the first Disciples called by the Lord, remember? These are the same three Jesus took with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane, to pray on the night that He was betrayed! These are the same three who fell asleep while they were there! They are “players” in the drama, to-be-sure! But certainly not perfect, are they! Try to imagine being there!

Right before their eyes, their Teacher, their Counselor, their Spiritual Leader is changed, transformed! He becomes Radiant! “His clothes become Dazzling White,” it says in the NIV, “whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them!” Then Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, face-to-face, two long-time Biblical Greats! After which, a loud, booming Voice comes thundering out of a cloud, proclaiming just who Jesus really is! “This is my Son,” says God! “Listen to Him!” ...What would you do with that?

I have heard a moment like that described as a “Wizard of OZ Moment”! I’m not sure if I like that description or not! But it does create a word picture! Here we are mere mortals, standing in the Gothic Hallways of the Emerald City, where we are greeted with an explosion, and great billows of smoke! A Giant, disembodied, sometimes menacing Voice, echoes, “I am OZ, the great and terrible! Who are you?” ...So, what do you do?

Would you attempt to respond, like Dorothy, and chance being silenced? Or would you approach with caution, like the Tin Man and the Scarecrow, filled with trepidation, wondering if the gifts that you seek will be bestowed upon you? Or might it take everything you’ve got to simply not faint with fear, like the Cowardly Lion? Epiphanies can be overwhelming, you know! Truly awe-filled moments, moments when Almighty God reaches through that Veil that separates us, and touches your heart! And then, afterwards, the ball is in your court!

I know some of you have had moments like these! Think back! Maybe you all have? I mean, you are here, right! So, at some point your spirit has been touched by God's Spirit! You experienced Holiness, first hand! You were given a glimpse of the Majesty of God, Witnessed the Divine! You were there on the Mountaintop, or maybe a gentle knoll! You saw the Chariot fade away into the clouds, or felt the Holy Spirit descend gently like a dove! And it was a gift too, a beautiful gift! But now, what do you do with that?

It's not about the moment, is it, no matter how powerful that moment might be! It's about the Narrative, the entire Story Line, all that happens before that moment, and especially all that happens after! This Movie, this Grand Drama unfolding over time, is not about you! And yet, you play a role!

An Epiphany may be scary! Believe me, I know! And maybe it should be? You might respond like Isaiah, or Jeremiah. Your knees might begin to knock. You might cry out, "I am just a child Lord"! "I don't know how to speak!" "Woe is me! I am ruined! I am a man or woman of unclean lips! And I live among a people of unclean lips! And yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!"

Or maybe instead, you turn inward? You know, like an "Extra" in a movie, shining the spotlight solely on yourself? Or maybe your response will be entirely different? But over time, as the smoke clears and the dust settles, and you realize that moment was actually an Epiphany from God—as you ever-so-slowly become aware of His Presence with you, then what?

Epiphanies come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, don't they! They happen on a grand scale, and in a small quiet whisper. They happen all the time, actually. The question is "are we being still enough to hear"! So, how often, in an average week would you say, you become "acutely aware" of the Presence of God? Does that correlate, in any way, with how intentional you are in setting aside time and creating a space for that to happen? How are you at removing the distractions, and simply turning your eyes towards Heaven?

I'm going to assume that becoming aware of God's Presence happens at prayer for you, and that you pray often! I'm going to assume that it periodically happens at Worship as well, and that you Worship each and every week! But in addition to those disciplined, intentional times—and apart from all those fearful times, when life has you backed into a corner, and you turn to God as a last resort—apart from those—how God-Aware do you think you really are?

It's a good question, isn't it? One we should each ask ourselves! A little unsettling, maybe? Or at the very least, reflective! But if it is not enough to make you stop and think, then how about this? How "God-Aware" are the people around you, based on what they see in you, and through you? I mean, as a Believer, you might just be an Epiphany for someone else! Did you know that?

On the way home from Church the little girl turned to her mom and said, "Mommy, the Pastor said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" "Yes Honey, that's true." "He also said that God is living in our heart. Is that true too?" "Yes Honey, that's true too."

“Well, if God is bigger than we are, and God is living in our heart, then shouldn’t He shine through?”

You can see where I’m going, can’t you? Are you an Epiphany, or not? Is your life an Epiphany? God is clearly bigger than we are! Even though we sometimes forget that! Or let our ego, or the world, or the Enemy tell us differently! And the Holy Spirit is definitely living in our heart! That’s a Biblical Promise! Once you accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, and are Baptized into His Name, that’s simply a given! So, if that’s the case, then shouldn’t the Spirit of the Lord shine through you? Or at the very least, leak out around the edges?

Once you’ve had an Epiphany, been to the Mountaintop, witnessed a Chariot of Fire ascend into the sky—once you’ve noticed the Majesty of God in whatever way He has caused it to happen—what is the appropriate response? Paul, in his Letter to the Church in Galatia suggests, Love and Joy, Peace and Patience, should radiate from your very being! Kindness and Goodness and Faithfulness will flow freely from the depths of your soul! And Gentleness and Self-Control will simply gush forth! And in his letter to the Colossians he adds, Compassion and Humility will be the norm! Let Peace Rule in your Hearts, he says!

Paul started out as a Sinner, separated from Jesus! He actually Persecuted Christians prior to his Conversion, and had them put to death! But then, on the Damascus Road, Paul had an Epiphany!

So, you tell me! As “Extras” in the Movie, doesn’t part of our role include being an Epiphany for others? Aren’t we instructed by the Director to let our Faith shine in the twinkling of our eyes, and dance on the turn of our smile? Isn’t the opposite of that, making people search, just to find a spark?

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up onto a Mountain to pray. And there, filled with the Holy Spirit, the Glory of God shines through Him! In that instant, the Veil obscuring our Lord’s true identity is pulled aside! Who He is, and Whose He is, is clearly revealed! And at the same time, the Curtain of Doubt for Peter and the boys is suddenly withdrawn! Briefly, maybe, but in an extraordinary way!

Physically, Jesus’ clothes become shimmering white, more amazing than we could ever explain! Spiritually, His True Nature is revealed! And a powerful, commanding Voice declares from Heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love! Listen to Him!” It is the same Voice, mind you, saying the very same thing that it did at Jesus’ Baptism! “This is my Son, whom I love! Listen to Him!”

For most of us, that would have been enough to get our attention, don’t you think? I know it would have been for me! But then, like Theological Icing on an Ontological Cake, two of the Greatest Religious Figures of all time appear on the stage! And Peter, in shock maybe, most certainly in Awe, starts stumbling over his words, probably like we might do, “Lord, should I set up a few tents? I sure am glad that we were here to help!”

These are good Jewish boys, remember. They would have known the Scriptures well! The implications, the echoes, would have been clear to them! Moses is the Great Law-Giver, who took three people with him up on Mt. Sinai to get the Commandments! There, God spoke to him from a cloud! And Moses' face became radiant from his encounter with God! In fact, after meeting with God, he had to wear a veil, if you recall! A Grand Drama is unfolding right before them! One clearly designed to point to the Almighty! And with Moses stands Elijah, arguably one of the Greatest Prophets of all-time! Right in front of them, as Jesus is Transfigured, are the very cornerstones of their Faith, The Law and The Prophets!

So, if you were there in the crowd, or on that stage—or as you stand on a smaller one maybe, cast as an “Extra” in the Movie—what role do you play? What role should you play? Consider that for a second! You are at the Gates of the Emerald City! You have seen Waters Parted, and the Glory of God shining on Jesus' face! You have Mentors and Leaders and Teachers that have guided you along the way! So now, what is your role in the Grand Drama? Where is your Mantle to pick up and carry?

Are you a Star maybe, a “Voice of Proclamation”, echoing the Voice that rains down from Heaven? Are you a Moses, or an Elijah, espousing the Law, or sharing Prophecy? Are you more like one of the Disciples—a Tin Man or a Scarecrow—frightened by the magnitude of what you see, yet willing to step up anyway? Maybe you're ready to faint even, like the Cowardly Lion, but you don't? Maybe you're like Peter—a bit confused right now, but feeling as if you need to do something! Tell me, Rabbi, what should I do?

Can you relate to any of these Biblical Heroes? Or to a different one maybe? I mean you've spent time in the Wilderness like some! You have helped point others to the Lord like some! You have been a Leader at times, and a Follower at others? You've shown folks the Lay of the Land, helped Guide others on the Journey? You've been there, right? Stood where Jesus is standing? At least momentarily and metaphorically! You have been dramatically changed by the Presence of Almighty God, haven't you? Something powerful happened between you and The Lord at some point! And now that Transformation clearly shows, right? On your face! In your actions! With your words!

I have to tell you I find the exchange between Peter and Jesus interesting. Telling maybe? Just six days prior to that Mountaintop, Peter realizes the truth, and makes what we call "The Good Confession". He publicly proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! But now, in the midst of all that's happening, less than a week later, Peter calls Jesus Rabbi and Teacher, instead of Lord! Why is that? Could it imply that Divine Revelation is sometimes a process? And we might slip backwards at times?

And I love the exchange between Elijah and Elisha too! Elijah asks his Protégée what he can do for him before he is taken away. And Elisha, like the eldest son in any Jewish family, asks for a double portion as his inheritance. He wants to do what Elijah did, and be who Elijah is! He doesn't want twice as much stuff! He wants to be Elijah's heir! "I want to carry on the Family Name," he says, in essence! "I want to carry your Mantle! I want to be your Legacy when you're gone!"

God's Movie includes "Equipping the Saints", doesn't it? But it also clearly mandates that we take on our own role in the Drama! And do so with gusto!

So, here's the thing, at least for me! Here is my final question to you this morning, as well as to myself, one I ask myself on a constant basis! Do my Encounters with the Lord radiate on my face? Do my Moments in the Presence show, for all to see? Since I've been confronted by the Glory of God, because I have seen the Veil of Heaven Momentarily Pierced, pulled aside by the Lord Himself—am I witnessing to that, with my Presence in the World?

I certainly don't need to wear a Veil, like Moses did, after his encounter with the Lord! Maybe, just for a while, a COVID Mask. But in all honesty, if God is bigger than me, and living within me, then shouldn't He show? And all of God's people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Reveal yourself to us Lord! Help us to notice your Glory. We know it surrounds us, Lord. We see it in the sparkling tree branches, and notice it in the pastel sky. We hear it in a newborn's cry, and smell it on a warm spring morning. And we sense it here Lord, in your House of Worship, among your People as we gather for Prayer. But open our eyes a bit wider, please. Thank you for being the Lord of our Lives! Thank you for reaching out to us, even when we don't think we need a hand. And thank you for your Promise of Salvation, through your Son, Jesus Christ. That revelation alone brings us to our knees in Awe! So, Lord, we entrust all that we do, and all that we are, and all that we will ever become, into your loving care with that Promise. We open up ourselves, our lives and our hearts, willingly, right now, placing our future into your Hands. We also place the lives of our loved ones into your Compassionate Arms Lord, for we know of your Grace, we have seen your Love, and we are aware of your Great Desire to Heal! Father, please Bless those who we have been praying for these past few weeks. And please touch each person whose name is on our prayer lists in a powerful way! Shower them with your Love Lord, and your Peace, and your Joy. Pour it out on all whose troubles are on our minds this morning—on each of those whose health, and safety, and welfare are tugging at our hearts right now—and on those we are not even aware of! And please Lord, rejoice with those who are rejoicing today, for you are the God of all things! Father, we especially ask for your Presence with Pour out your Grace on each of these lives lifted before you today, upon this Church Lord, and upon your World. We ask this in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and pray together now the very prayer that He has taught us saying, Our Father...