

Mark 9:2-9 Transfiguration 19 February 2012

That day on that mountain was a new day, the disciples had no idea what was coming. They might have suspected that something might happen.. after all mountains are the places of Epiphany.. Moses went up the mountain and received the law.. Moses' face shone. We might expect revelation.

I wonder what they talked about as they ascended the mountain? Winding in and out.. thinking the summit is close, only to see more mountain, walking down for a bit before ascending again...up and up, higher and higher, moving towards a horizon, thinking they were almost there, then coming over a rise and finding another, What were their questions, their thoughts as they walked, then reached the summit. Wow! What was the view like? What did they see? Fresh air, away from the crowds.. a time for refreshment and prayer

This was such a special time with only closest friends.
the disciples are as puzzled as usual at what's going on.
Let's stay here build a church, a synagogue a theological college.. capture it hold it. is it it is special and we are here.. Maybe Peter's wanting to build shelters is a forerunner of the way we construct church comfort zones through wanting to pin things down, keep them as they are, bring them under any little control we can manage.

He didn't get it and the voice says as at Jesus baptism, only now the voice is talking to us.. this is my beloved son, listen to him. and what is he, Jesus, saying, that he is going to suffer and die, i don't want to hear that, i prefer this bliss. listen listen to him.. they, i still don't get it.. i thought this is what religion is all about.. beauty and majesty and quiet prayer.. no, listen to him.. and he says lets go down.

If there's a case for anyone to stay up there, it's Jesus! But he has an Exodus to accomplish in Jerusalem.. back to suffering, his own and others.. back to needy and sick and demons.. back.. So down the mountain he comes. We know what he runs slap bang into! People wanting to come in from their margins. Are we any more us than the disciples were? Mc Gowan

This is true religion..take up your CROSS take up your cross and follow me.. i don't know about that.. but that is where the excitement is.. Covenant Care, St Johns Care.. Forc.. at work at home in the market place.. yes, we have been invited up the mountain, yes we have been there.. and seen, and been awestruck.. now after yesterday's quiet day,

after the retreat, after meditation, after Eucharist.. and all of these are part of the journey, after theses.. back down the mountain to be God for others. to offer love and understanding and compassion, healing casting out demons, sharing the good news... being there...He says let's go down

'Listen to him!', alas, they will not show themselves good listeners but will pursue their ambitions of greatness (9:30-34; 10:33-45).Loader

Coming down the mountain, Jesus tells the disciples (as often in MK) to keep to themselves what they've seen 'except when the Son of man, humanity, Adam & Eve, etc. should rise from the dead'. I wonder if this isn't the best putting together, holding in tension, we have of the two 'thrusts' implicit in 'Son of man' - (human) Suffering Servant, & (divine) Deliverer, Saviour.

If Mark had been producing a movie, we would be quite used to the technique of cutting to a symbolic scene which served as a commentary on the movie as a whole. The narrative of the transfiguration is similarly meant to be understood in the light of the whole of Jesus' ministry, indeed, to throw light on it. That will include not only what has come to this point in Mark, but especially what follows. That is the point of the waiting in 9:9. The distinctive emphasis in what follows is the path of lowliness and suffering which the disciples fail to 'hear'. Loader

Is it when the going gets too hard fulfilling our humanity through serving each other, inevitably suffering something in the process, is it then some of us lean more in the direction of supernatural intervention? When is it time to head up our mountain? When is the time to come steadfastly down? Mc Gowan

In 'Binding the Strong Man' [Orbis, '88, '97, p.250] Ched Myers speaks of what happens on the mountain top as 'a kind of salvation-history summit conference'. Not bad, eh! Mc Gowan

Chittister: (edited)

There is no doubt about it, in a society of gross imbalances somebody has to ask, "What is the role of religion? Should it be a private refuge or a public presence and how will we ever know?"

The Vietnamese tell a folk tale that I think goes right to the point of the question. The Vietnamese say that there is only one difference between heaven and hell. In hell, they have chopsticks three feet long and the people can't eat. In heaven, they have chopsticks three feet long but the

people feed each another.

The purpose of holiness is not to protect us from our world. The purpose of holiness is to change the way we live in the world, not for our own sake but for the sake of others. Jesus demands the same thing. For some reason or other, we often miss that point. We are more inclined to want a religion that comforts us than challenges us. Why? Where did we ever get that idea? Maybe it is because we have misunderstood, or at least forgotten, the meaning of Sabbath, the importance of mountain symbolism in religious literature and the effect of the very placement of gospel text.

. Week after week after week, we have to ask the questions, "What changes are demanded of us now?" That answer, I think, depends on how we see the role of religion.

There is a scripture story about the Transfiguration of Christ that gives us an idea, (about the role of religion) In the story of the Transfiguration, the disciples began to see Jesus differently.

What they see at the top of that mountain is, at least, unexpected and certainly disturbing. You see, at the top of that mountain before those apostles, Jesus does not appear with Aaron the priest, who was the interpreter of the law. Jesus doesn't appear there with David the King, the defender of the state. No, Jesus does not appear with symbols of royalty or ritualism. Jesus appears to those apostles with Moses, Elijah, the prophets. Moses, who led the people out of oppression; Elijah, whom King Ahab had called, "that trouble of Israel," because he condemned the people's compromise between true and false gods as the underlying cause of their problems.

In a gospel apparently about the mystical dimension of religion, there is a troubling, teeming undercurrent of turmoil, a struggle between piety and real Christianity, a struggle between religion for real and religion for show. The gospel shows us that Peter, in your name and mine, opted for piety. "Let's settle down here, Jesus, and build three booths."

I'm not really sure, but I think what he had in mind was a chancery, a seminary and a college. Peter, in other words, was opting for a religion of temples, institutions and shrines. Peter was opting for a religion that transcends the world, but the scripture reads that before he could even finish speaking, God interrupted and said, "Listen."

Then something happens that we too often forget. The gospel is completed by a portion that is usually unread, too little remembered, too much

unfulfilled. At the very moment, when it would seem that Jesus is emphasizing the mystical and transcendent dimension of religion, Jesus himself takes the apostles away from visions, away from privatized religion, to meet the ones who needed them most in the town.

Jesus takes them to the man whose son was possessed by a demon. Jesus himself leads them down to the bottom of that mountain to the hurting people, unbelieving officials, the ineffective institutions and the demons below.

Real religion is not about building temples and keeping shrines. Real religion is about healing hurts, speaking for and being with the poor, the helpless, the voiceless and the forgotten who are at the silent bottom of every pinnacle, every hierarchy and every system in both state and church, church and state.

Real religion, the scripture insists, is not about transcending life; real religion is about our transforming life. The gospel of the transfiguration calls us to Sabbath; calls us to become enlightened; calls us to change our attitudes about the role of religion; calls us to understand the nature of religion itself; because the so-called rational has failed.

it. The people below, the people at the bottom of our mountains, wait to be healed of the diseases that spring from our spiritual darkness. The poor wait for jobs; the homeless wait for shelter; children are waiting for food; young people are waiting for education and job training; the elderly are waiting for care that we say that we can't afford in one of the richest nations in the world.

Every year the working poor, the people who suffer under part-time pay for part-time work or double-time work for part-time pay, get poorer and poorer in this country and around the globe.

Religion, you see, does not call us to the rational. Religion calls us to the Beatitudes, to the works of mercy, to the casting out of demons, to the doing of miracles for those in need, to the being and act of irrational love and burning justice of God. That is what the Transfiguration is about, that is what religion is really about, changing ourselves so we can change the world

Once upon a time a group of disciples asked an elder, "Does your God work miracles?"

The elder said, "Well, it all depends on what you mean by a miracle. Some people say it's a miracle that God does the will of the people. We say, it's a miracle when people do the will of God."

What is the role of religion in society, private refuge or public presence? Transfiguration means that the role of religion demands enlightenment. The role of religion is to bring us to an awareness of life. The role of religion is to transform the world, to come to see the world as God sees the world and to bring it as close to the vision of God as we possibly can. Why? Scripture is very clear. What God changes, God changes through us.

We can go up the mountain today, and be inspired and nourished.. and tomorrow? Where will we be?..

Susanna Pain

Resources:

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=2/22/2009&tab=4

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkTransfig.htm>

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/marginallymark/MMK929TRANSFIG.html>

http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/chittister_3508.htm

<http://www.textweek.com/mkjnacts/mark9a.htm>