



God's Home-No Razzle Dazzle Here - TouchPoint for February 27, 2019

Luke 9:28-36 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white" And Peter said "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us make a dwelling."

The Transfiguration passage comes around every year. It is the last passage read in many churches, on the Sunday before Lent begins, before Ash Wednesday. I used to have some difficulty preaching on it because it's not always easy to come up with something new from one year to the next and I don't want to repeat myself. I remember expressing this to a pastor friend of mine, once, and she just started laughing hysterically. When I asked "Why are you laughing?" She said, "You're in a no lose situation, Jim. If someone remembers what you said from a year ago then it's worth repeating. And if they don't remember you're good to go." Hadn't quite thought of it that way before.

So if some of this sounds familiar from last year thanks for remembering; and if it doesn't, well then, I just came up with this stuff this past week. Oh, and by the way, this applies to next week's Ash Wednesday Touchpoint as well, in a big way.

"And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white." Peter speaks for us all when he says, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us make a dwelling"—a monument as it were. This is the God we were always looking for. Clothed in glory. White, bright and dazzling. And yet, it is at this point that God speaks: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him!" God speaks **AFTER** Peter has spoken.

For Peter, and I dare say for us, once we have seen the Transfiguration we have seen enough. We have heard enough. This is the God of our hopes. This is the God of our dreams. White, bright and dazzling. This is the Messiah as **we conceive** him. And yet, after this a voice is heard. "This is MY beloved Son. Listen to Him!"

It's not over. It's not done. The Messiah is not fully revealed. There is an important departure in Jerusalem that needs to take place, so important, it needs to be discussed with Moses and Elijah. Apparently, **God** is the one who **conceives** the Messiah, not us. We, like Peter, would rather worship Jesus than listen to him. We would rather worship and venerate him, rather than follow him. After all, acts of worship are so much easier than acts of discipleship. Peter wants to use a hammer and nails to build a monument to God's power and glory. Jesus would rather use a hammer and nails to make him at-one with those who suffer.

Worship and discipleship—they are not always the same thing. And sometimes they are at odds with each other. In the book *Silence*, by Shusaku Endo, a priest is faced with such a dilemma. Japanese Christians and ex-communicated Christians are being tortured if they don't step on an image of Jesus and some are still tortured even after they do. Throughout the whole book, the priest watches as these people are tortured and put to death, and God remains silent, and the priest suffers as he wonders where God is in all of this.

Those the priest sees as true Christians, those who have not stepped on the image, and those he sees as apostate Christians, those who have already stepped on the image, all are hung by their feet over pits filled with dung, and cut behind their ears so they will slowly and painfully bleed to death. Now, the only way the priest can save them both is to step on an image of Christ.

And so the dilemma:

TO NOT STEP on the image is an act of worship and veneration.

TO STEP on the image is an act of discipleship.

Because in stepping on the image the priest becomes the outcast. The priest becomes sin. In stepping on the image the priest gives up his life as he knows himself to be. He dies to his conception of Christianity. And in so doing, he saves others. In other words, he lays down his life for others, he empties himself of all he holds dear by becoming sin for them. Does that sound like anyone you know from scripture?

Throughout the whole book, *Silence*, God has remained silent, hence the name of the book. But now, at the end, as the priest looks at the image of Christ before his feet, the image speaks. "Trample! Trample!" speaks the image, "It is to be trampled on by you that I am here." The priest in the book reflects on it this way.

*"I, too, stood **on** the sacred image. For a moment this foot was **on** his face. It was **on** the face of the man who has been ever in my thoughts, **on** the face that was before me on the mountains, in my wanderings, in prison, **on** the best and most beautiful face that any man can ever know, **on** the face of him whom I have always longed to love. Even now that face is looking at me with eyes of pity from the plaque rubbed flat by many feet. "Trample!" said those compassionate eyes. "Trample! Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on this plaque. But that pain alone is enough. I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason that I am here."*

"Lord, I resented your silence."

"I was not silent. I suffered beside you." [says the Lord]

Let's face it, we, like Peter, would rather worship Jesus than listen to him. We would rather worship and venerate him, rather than follow him. After all, acts of worship are so much easier than acts of discipleship. Peter wants to use a hammer and nails to build a monument to God's power and glory. Jesus would rather use a hammer and nails to make him at-one with those who suffer.

What does it mean to listen to and follow the one who counted equality with God not something to be grasped? Which is all we seem to want to grasp.

I can't tell you the number of pastors who I have heard say, "It may be Good Friday, but Easter is coming." But how many pastors have you ever heard say, "It may be the Transfiguration, but the crucifixion is coming." What does it mean to listen to the one who says that it is in losing our lives that we will be found—will be saved?

I mean, when have you ever heard a losing player in the Super Bowl step up to the microphone and say, "I want to thank my personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for giving me the opportunity to lose this game and die to my individual dreams, so that I might be raised up as ... and gain my life as ... a beloved child of God, just like all the other losers in the world." *Yeah, me neither.*

For Peter, and I dare say for us, once we have seen the Transfiguration we have seen enough. We have heard enough. This is the God of our hopes. This is the God of our dreams. White, bright and dazzling. This is the Messiah as **we conceive** him. And so like Peter we cry out. *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us make a dwelling."* But as verses in Revelation, II Corinthians, Ezekiel and elsewhere state, "God's dwelling place is with people." And so the Mystery doesn't need us to build a dwelling place for it. The Mystery has already built one—in our hearts and in our lives.

"The Word became flesh and dwells among us." The Word dwells among us in our pain and suffering, in our joys and sorrows. In life and death and life again. In the beginning, the Mystery breathed its spirit into us. In the middle, it took on flesh and then poured its Spirit on all. And in the end a new Jerusalem comes down from heaven and takes its place on earth.

And so the words from the book Silence:

"Trample!" said those compassionate eyes. "Trample! I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason that I am here ... I was not silent. I suffered beside you."

The Mystery doesn't need us to build a dwelling place for it. The Mystery has already built one. In our hearts and in our lives, in our pain and suffering, in our joys and sorrows. In life and death and life again.

Think of this meal. Where does the Mystery take up residence? Where does the Mystery find its home? Its dwelling place? In the heart of the betrayer, the denier, the doubter and the cowards.

"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us make a dwelling" Peter says.

"No thank you." Jesus replies, "I've already got one. And it's not outside you, but within you. Even as you deny me and betray me, you are my dwelling place."

Amen.