



## When God Became Unhinged – TouchPoint for February 10, 2021

**Mark 9:2-10 MSG** <sup>2-4</sup> Six days later, three of them did see it. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them. Elijah, along with Moses, came into view, in deep conversation with Jesus.

<sup>5-6</sup> Peter interrupted, “Rabbi, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.” He blurted this out without thinking, stunned as they all were by what they were seeing.

<sup>7</sup> Just then a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and from deep in the cloud, a voice: “This is my Son, marked by my love. Listen to him.”

<sup>8</sup> The next minute the disciples were looking around, rubbing their eyes, seeing nothing but Jesus, only Jesus. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Coming down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy. “Don’t tell a soul what you saw. After the Son of Man rises from the dead, you’re free to talk.” They puzzled over that, wondering what on earth “rising from the dead” meant.

### **Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make a dwelling for you and Moses and Elijah.”*

In reading all the commentaries on this passage, there seems to be one point of agreement... The Transfiguration story is a hinge story. It is a transition story. It stands as a mid-point hinge in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus now turns his face to Jerusalem. It stands as a mid-point hinge between the Christmas/Epiphany seasons and the Lenten/ Easter seasons.

The words of God, “This is my beloved Son” have echoes in the Baptism of Jesus story at the beginning of his ministry, where the same words are spoken over him, but only he hears. They foreshadow the future at his crucifixion where the centurion utters similar words, “Truly this man is the Son of God.” And all others hear.

These words in the middle act as a hinge to the beginning and end of Jesus life on earth.

The Transfiguration takes place on a mountaintop. We don't know which mountain – we don't know where – but we do know it was a HIGH mountain. And yet, it presages another mountain...

Mount Calvary: a mountain of which we do know where, and one we might not call high but rather a low point in human history.

Now it's clear which mountain we prefer. It's clear which mountain we want God to be hinged to...and which one we want our faith to hinge on. 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. And I think it's pretty apparent that that is not something we can imagine Peter or us saying at Mount Calvary on Good Friday.

Now if that is the case, then the Transfiguration story isn't so much a hinge story, as it were, but an

unhinging story

It is the beginning of the unhinging of God. From here on out. God is going to unhinge Godself from whom we think God is. God is going to unhinge Godself from whom we want God to be. God is going to unhinge Godself from the God we would choose to worship.

The Transfiguration story is the beginning of the unhinging of God, from our thoughts, our ways, our beliefs.

“Rabbi, let us build a dwelling place” a monument as it were! 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.

Now those of us who live in the most powerful nation on earth will have trouble with that. We who live in power, who hold power, who exercise power, will always want to see the primary attribute of God as power. But this passage, and others like it, point to a God whose first attribute is not power but vulnerability: one who suffers with, one who suffers alongside, one who suffers for.

For the ending of this passage is clear that one cannot fully understand who Jesus is until one has seen him suffer and die...and then be raised. That is why he tells his disciples to tell no one. Because you can't define the Christ until you see him hanging on a cross.

The Transfiguration story is the beginning of the unhinging of God, from our thoughts, our ways, our beliefs.

“Lord, let us build a dwelling place” a monument as it were! 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.

This is so brilliantly written about in the book “Silence” by Shusaku Endo. Without giving the story away, because I strongly, strongly, strongly urge you to buy it and read it, and because I don't think there is another book or story outside of the Bible that so changed, so unhinged, so crucified and resurrected my faith, as this book.

The story is about a priest who comes to Japan. There he witnesses the horrific suffering and persecution of Japanese Christians. And he keeps asking God, “Why do you allow this to happen?” If God is all powerful, why doesn't God do something. Why does God remain silent?

Even as the priest remains strong in his own suffering, which he imagines makes him one with Christ – Christ-like – God remains silent. And he can't understand why. It is only at the end of the story, when he becomes weak, when he fails in his own eyes and betrays his own beliefs and faith, only then is the 'Silence' broken.

Only when his suffering connects him to the Japanese Christians...not to his Christ image...only when he becomes like them...only when he becomes 'sin' on their account... Only then does God speak...Only then is the 'Silence' broken...and God reveals Godself as one who suffers with...takes on the suffering of...and becomes the suffering one.

That's why, the central symbol of our faith is the cross, not the empty tomb nor the Mount of Transfiguration. Though some churches have tried to replace it with a dove. And even those who haven't

replaced it have certainly tried to tame it. I know I have.

I have a friend who is fond of saying, “I guess that is my cross to bear.” He likes to use that phrase when he is talking about something in his life that is bothering him or that he doesn't like. And he uses the phrase to describe the cross, or 'his crosses', as something he carries around with him, something he bears.

But here is the thing...the cross isn't something we bear...it bears us. And you can spell that any way you want: b-e-a-r or b-a-r-e.

Kosuke Koyama, another Japanese Christian theologian, and yes, I have been reading a lot of them lately. Kosuke Koyama, in his book, “No Handle on the Cross” says that for too long, Christianity has seen the cross as something we carry around...kind of in the same way we carry around a briefcase or a lunch box by its handle. We put a little handle on the cross to make it manageable and carry it around as if it is something that is smaller than us.

But this is not the cross of Christ he says. That cross is bigger than us. That cross has no handle. That cross bears us rather than us bearing it. We are attached to the cross rather than it being something we attach a handle to and carry around.

The central symbol of our faith is the cross, not the empty tomb. Because what is important isn't just the event of the resurrection...but who is resurrected.

For the ending of this passage is clear that one cannot fully understand who Jesus is until one has seen him suffer, die...and then be raised.

And who is it that God raises from the dead? Who is the one who God calls “My beloved Son” on this Mount? Who is the one who is transfigured? It is the one who shows God, not in all God's power...but God in God's weakness, God's suffering, God's brokenness.

So now, to paraphrase St. Paul, “All things have been taken up into God.” Sin, suffering, brokenness. All of these things are now a part of the divine. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God has taken all things into God's being. God has hinged Godself to the totality of human existence.

And so, you and I can never be outside of God.

You know, maybe we should describe what happened on the cross, not as an ‘atonement’, but as a ‘hinging.’ The Transfiguration story is the beginning of the unhinging of God...from our thoughts... our ways...our beliefs.

“Lord, let us build a dwelling place” a monument as it were! Peter wants to use a hammer and nails to build a monument to God's power and glory.

This is the God we want to build a monument to: one that we can give glory to after we win the super bowl or achieve something great. You know, our great accomplishment somehow reflects the greatness of God and God's superiority.

But Jesus would rather use a hammer and nails to make him at-one with those who suffer.

That's why I keep waiting to hear a player from the losing team in the Super Bowl 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."

Somehow, I think I'm going to be waiting awhile. Because you see, we want the God of power and glory.

But here in this meal, we find a God unhinged from all of that.

Here in this meal, we find One who meets us...and finds His glory, not in our greatest accomplishments but in our time of weakness, our time of denial and doubt, betrayal and bafflement.

God becomes unhinged from our idea of divine glory to become a God hinged to the cross, a God who hinges Himself with those who doubt, betray and deny.

God becomes unhinged from our idea of divine glory on a mountaintop to be hinged with us in the ordinary elements of bread and wine, and in the ordinary depths of daily life.

God becomes unhinged from our idea of divine glory, so God can become hinged to us in all aspects of our life and death, our joy and suffering, our faith and doubt.

God... unhinged from whom we think God should be...  
so that God can be hinged with whom we actually are.

Amen

## **Spirit in the Desert**

### **Opening Songs**

#### **Be Still**

Be Still, know that I am God

#### **You Lord Are In This Place**

You Lord are in 1)...this place.  
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it.  
Your presence is peace.

#### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

#### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

#### **Dwell Among Us**

Keep moving and living and breathing in us  
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us  
You dwell among us...  
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me  
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

#### **The Meal**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Benediction**

#### **Let Your Servant**

Let your servant now go in peace, O Lord  
Now go in peace according to your word