



TOUCH POINT

Earth, Water and Fire – Touchpoint for February 7, 2024

Mark 9:2-11 (NRSVUE) The Transfiguration

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The Coming of Elijah

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹ Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

Hebrews 12:1 (NRSVUE) The Example of Jesus

¹² Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

From Henry: Jesus’ garments were whiter than any laundry could get them. Like as a cloud perhaps? Spirit was present. Announcing to the witnesses below to listen to his beloved son. Spirit was bearing witness with Jesus’ spirit and those who had gone before him. What does that mean, ‘Spirit bears witness with our spirit’? In Romans 8:16 we read, ‘It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.’ Look at that! Big “S” Spirit bears witness with small “s” spirit within us. The two long to experience what the ego interferes with. Peter, James and John are witnesses to the Spirit bearing witness with the human spirit in Christ. They will never see Jesus or their ancestors the same way again.

Hebrews 12:1 (NRSVUE) The Example of Jesus

⁶ For it is the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

The flow of life and spirit is not linear. It is one, and made up of layer upon layer of life stories unconstrained by darkness. In a linear world, Elijah was a forerunner. He often worked with fire. Moses was the lawgiver and he worked with water. Jesus was down to earth. Period. However, these lives are not linear as in cause-and-effect, but a continuation of Divine Infinity rendered from the layers of stories over time. My therapist friends will often ask their clients to do a timeline. I prefer a story line with layers of lines.

In this biblical event, three persons are on the mountain and three are in the valley, staring up, as witnesses. There is another witness that shows up as a cloud. It is Spirit. Spirit is stirred when its children love each other. There is no greater experience for parents than to see their young ones walk off to school and spontaneously grab hands. As a parent, you stare in silent awe, because they usually fight. Their capacity to care for each other without prompting stuns us in a good way. Spirit is stirred when we love each other and commune with each other.

Jesus is telling the disciples there is a different way to be than what they've experienced before. We, too, may need to see things in a different way. Life, death, and oneness. The Jewish culture may have seen Elijah as a forerunner in a particular way, and expected Elijah to proclaim certain words to prepare the way for the Messiah. It all would be great, except Elijah was not exactly treated well, and he would die. Jesus would not be treated well either, and he would die. The endings were never exactly the way the Jews, or gentiles expected.

Prior to this ascension, Jesus had told them he would die. Could that week have been any more traumatizing for Peter, James and John? Grieving, the talk of death, then Resurrection and now Ascension. On this mountain the Spirit is stirred.

Following the Ascension, Jesus' garments become white as a cloud. The glory of the Lord showed on him. This event of the glory indicates that we must see things different than we saw them before. Unless we are willing to see things differently, it is difficult to be a witness to the way and glory of Christ. One way of being open is not to see life as linear. Christ comes in the moments of our mountains and valleys and in our stories.

These three, Peter James and John, were invited to see things differently than they had in the past. The Bible says they were taken to the mountain alone. Emphasis on alone. Ironically, they will come to see that they never were alone. As they approach the mountain, they are about to witness Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus.

Now appearing on one stage! Elijah the flame thrower. Moses the water mover. And Jesus the earth shaker. Watch them in their element! Direct your attention to the top of this mountain and I present to you, in their elements... Earth, Water and Fire.

Seriously though, what a powerful moment for Peter, James and John! Until now, Jesus had been telling them parables, giving them wisdom, teaching them how to live in a chaotic and heartless world, and performing miracles in everyday lives. Now he's going to tell them that he's not on his own. He has a whole cloud of witnesses who have come before his earthly life. They died, yet somehow are present in the Glory of the Lord on the mountain. The mystery we call God is not visible in this moment on the mountain, but reveals itself in the face of Jesus and a voice in the clouds. They are standing in the Glory of God and the disciples are witnesses. The invisible mystery in whom we live and move and have our being is reflected in the face of Jesus. Jesus is joined by Elijah and Moses as witnesses to Peter, James and John. God remains invisible yet revealed in all things, including the faces of people willing to experience intimacy with Spirit.

In this unimaginable heavenly experience, I love the human part of the story. Peter was terrified and doesn't know what to say. So, he offers to build dwellings for the three on the mountain. What else would a guy say who has heard about the Ark of the Covenant, the Temples... the tents where God lived? He just was stunned in the moment. I seriously had to stop and laugh. The writer must have had fun writing, 'Peter didn't know what to say!' In the awkward silence, as they gazed up at the three prophets whispering to each other, somebody had to bail everyone out!

They came alone but Peter, James and John were not alone anymore. Jesus had said days before that he was going to leave, and he would die. What a blow to hear from your friend and mentor and rescuer! But to the three watching Elijah, Moses and Mystery, Jesus was saying, 'We are your witnesses. I said I would never leave you or forsake you. This is what I meant when I said I will never leave you or forsake you. God is in all things and all those who have gone before us. You will do even greater things. You may be terrified, but you have a cloud of witnesses for your family and friends and in your aloneness. I Am is with us.'

As for the bright mystery shining on Jesus' face and garments? The earthly human Jesus is made the glory of God. The law has no life, humanity no breath, the earth no footing, lest it be grounded in the glory and included in all things. All the elements.

Elijah worked with fire. Moses did a lot with water and Jesus was down to earth. Like literally, he did a lot with earth. He walked on water, poured the spring of everlasting life, and was baptized. Jesus spoke of wheat and broke bread. He was the light of the world. Then he was resurrected from earth's grave. The elements are intertwined with all the kingdom's eternal existence. Peter was called the rock, James and John the sons of, wait for it... thunder! Peter, James and John must have remembered when Jesus spoke of Spirit and miraculously moved the elements... particularly life-giving water for all who are thirsty, harvests for the hungry and soon, the Spirit with the boldness of wind and flame to make all things new.

Jesus invites Peter, James and John to be witnesses of Elijah and Moses beyond the grave. The hope of the glory spoken of.

Before being witnesses of this moment on the mountain with Elijah and Moses, they've been witnesses to Jesus's life and his message of hope and transformation.

Have you witnessed a piece of God's glory in nature or in people? Who are your witnesses? The Jews had their God moments. A cloud appeared to guide them. They knew exactly what the image of a cloud meant. It meant that God is here, or leading, or standing behind. Clouds are referenced throughout the stories in the Old Testament. Maybe this is what Paul means in the book of Hebrews when he writes, 'we are surrounded by a whole cloud of witnesses.' The mystery of God is in the cloud of our witnesses, both living and gone. There is a cloud of witnesses both in people's lives, and in the elements. Peter is a witness to the cloud of three. He was called the rock. James and John are witnesses to this cloud of three. They were called the sons of thunder. It can't be a coincidence that the elements of the earth and skies are intertwined with the faces and lives of people.

Jesus said he would leave, that he was going to die. Yes, and we all will die. Nevertheless, we become part of the cloud of witnesses. The eternal presence and eternal knowing. Jesus is saying you may be at the bottom of this mountain, and we may be at the top of this mountain, but we are witnesses. All of us. We want the world to know that we are a union of brothers and sisters. One family, stretching out from one end of history to the other. You will never be alone, whether in the valley or on the mountaintop. There is a whole cloud of witnesses. I'm not sure of the many dimensions of this cloud of witnesses. Perhaps it's a... Mystery? The answer is in Mystery. A Mystery, just as the voice from within the cloud. Not a knowable Mystery, but an eternally knowing Mystery.

The passages read, 'Then a cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my son, from my bosom and I love him. Listen to him.'" Jesus is no longer just the dude who brought odd ways of being and spoke in word puzzles. He wasn't just a friend of Peter, James and John. He was also friends with Elijah, Moses, and the Mystery. Jesus introduced his earthly friends to his witnesses Elijah, Moses, Jesus, Peter, James and John, but they all are witnesses to the Mystery we've called God. We have witnesses in our lives. Who are the witnesses in your life in the now? Who do you share a heavenly meal with in the Glory of Christ?

Amen

Luke says it very clearly: "But **you will** receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon **you**, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, in Flagstaff, Salem, Andover, Scottsdale, Thousand Oaks, and even Oslo, Cave Creek, Sedona, Carefree, and to the ends of the earth."

Romans 8:16

It is that very **Spirit** bearing **witness** with our **spirit** that we are children of God.

Acts 5:32

And we are **witnesses** to these things, and so is the Holy **Spirit** whom God has given to those who obey him.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir, Remember Me)

Be still, know that I am God

Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Dwell Among Us

(Salt of the Sound)

- 1) Keep moving and living and breathing in us
- 2) Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
- 3) You dwell among us...
- 4) With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
- 5) Lord send Your Spirit here to work in us.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

Sevenfold Amen

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.