



MINISTER
DAN YEAZEL
KIM JOHNSON, PREACHING

Transfiguration of the Lord
February 3, 2008

Matthew 17:1-9

Ever Faithful, Ever Sure

A Preacher stood up in the pulpit one Sunday morning and addressed the congregation, "Stand up if you want to go to heaven!" Of course, everyone got to their feet and stood proudly for the preacher to see their faith and confidence; everyone that was, except one elderly man sitting in the back of the sanctuary. At first, no one thought too much of it because they knew the man was very hard of hearing and often did not participate. But then the preacher gave a new instruction, "Stand up if you want to go to hell!" Quickly, everyone sat back down... except the elderly man, who fumbled for his cane and stood up boldly. A huge gasp came from the confused congregation and the preacher stood in the pulpit, baffled and unsure of what to say - silence took over - until the elderly man shouted, "Well Preacher, I don't know what we are voting on.. But it looks like you and I are the only one's going for it!"

Voting, campaigning, elections have been very prominent in our lives lately. And I'll be the first to admit I am so tired of turning

on *Good Morning America* every morning to hear endless reports of the Presidential Race - it's a long time until November. I mentioned this to my very political cousin on the phone this week and he said, "But Kim, you need to be an informed voter!" At which I responded, "yeah, I also need to keep watch over the World Series, but not in February!" But he's right, really; it all comes down to the fact that soon enough, November will be here and we will need to cast our votes for our next President. So, discovering just who our candidates are, is, important. Who do we question, who do we appreciate? Who presents the best ideals, the best visions, the best goodwill for our world? Who demonstrates the qualities we like to see in our leaders? These are all important things to know about those in whom we place our trust. And so begrudgingly, we listen and we try to discover just who each of the candidates are, and who we are sure will be faithful in their duty.

It is interesting in our Scripture readings today and in the story of the Transfiguration as a whole; that we have three characters - three candidates, if you will. There is Jesus, there is Moses, and there is Elijah. Of course, there are also the disciples, Peter and James, but let's stick with those in whom the event on the mountain centers upon; Jesus walks to the top of a mountain and is quickly joined by images of Moses and Elijah. Anybody ever wonder why? Why when he probably goes up to the top of a mountain to pray does he all of a sudden transfigure - why does his face shine like the sun - why do his clothes become dazzling white - and why on earth do Moses and Elijah, two guys in history, all of a sudden appear by his side? Do you ever wonder just *why* all this happened? (Now would be a good time to say, "Yes, Kim, we do wonder why.")

The Transfiguration is an extremely telling story in the book of Matthew, (as it is in the Gospel of Mark): By portraying Jesus alongside Moses and Elijah, Matthew is demonstrating how Jesus lines up with the continuous display of God's fulfillment as begun in the Old Testament. You'll remember that both Moses and Elijah were prophets who were called by God for their service - and while both were rejected by their people, they both held sure faith in God's guidance in their lives. In other words, God called them to lead the people, the people rejected them, but they kept doing what God was asking them to do. Now, we all know that's no easy task. It often seems the voice and actions of the people take precedence over the voice and

action of God. Yet, Moses and Elijah were ever faithful. And when things got rough and dirty, they held on to their covenant with God and they found strength to continue their work, which allowed them both to work miracles, and ultimately, to be considered as transcendent figures who did not die but were taken directly to heaven. But while they were Godly figures - it was always made clear that one more faithful yet was still to come.

This was the story passed on from generation to generation, this was the faith the people of Israel hoped to live for... And when this Jesus came into their lives, they always wondered, and sort of knew that there was something to this guy - there was something that made them follow, but they didn't quite grasp exactly who he was and what they meant. So, when Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the mountain, the disciples can't help but question the parallel between their legacy and the life of Jesus; Moses and Elijah were called by God, Jesus was called by God. Moses and Elijah were set apart for certain work, Jesus was set aside for certain work. And Moses and Elijah were upheld as honorable prophets called and installed by God, so Jesus too, must be somehow vindicated to higher standing. This appearance and connection with Moses and Elijah allowed the disciples to fully grasp in their own minds just exactly who Jesus was and to what extent his ministry was connected to God's kingdom. They were seeing him as more than just the self-professed Son of God, they were seeing him as truly connected to God and God's fulfillment.

It's like one of those Epiphany moments we talked about not long ago... when something happens that allows us to understand the larger picture. Last week, someone asked me, if I thought Jesus ever rode a snowmobile. Now, being pretty confident about the tools and inventions of that period of time, I could honestly say, "No, I don't think Jesus ever rode a snowmobile." But then the question came, "Well, do you think Jesus would have ridden a snowmobile if he were here today?" Again, I answered with confidence, only this time I said, "Yes! I think Jesus was all about fun and excitement and living life in the abundance of joy - I think he would have rode, and drove, and laughed, and said, 'let's do that again!'" Now, the question may have been asked in jest, but it got me thinking - what is our image of Jesus? If he were walking earth in human form right now, what do we imagine he would look like? What would he do for a living? And how would he act - What would he do for fun, what community organizations would he get involved with? We can probably all imagine our own answers - our own ideas or images, but when we stop and think about it, how do we picture Jesus? Who exactly is he in our lives? In our world? And when we start to play around with this invitation to discover him as real in our lives, we come to a sense of realization, an epiphany of sorts, that Jesus Christ can be real and true in the flesh to us. We can indeed bring Jesus into our world and imagine how he would act and respond and live and grow. And when we do this, we begin to grow more faithful, more sure of who this Christ just may be.

And so seeing this connection between Jesus and Moses and Elijah, Peter begins to understand Jesus' role. But at first, he places him in the category of a prophet... "if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The proposal of a dwelling, or a tent, is linked with a temple or tabernacle, a symbol of God's continuous presence with the people - like the ark of the covenant. Peter begins to understand Jesus as a prophet of God and he offers what is right and normal for their day, to build a shrine. But before Jesus can answer him, Peter finds out that Jesus is much more than a prophet. A bright cloud overshadows them and a voice from heaven speaks, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Now, when the disciples here this they drop to their knees in fear, and for good reason! It was that same heavenly voice that spoke at the time of Jesus' baptism, "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." The possibility of Jesus being something more than a prophet was increasingly clear, as the heavenly voice confirmed the identity of Jesus - and this time it went further to say, "listen to him!" This comes right from Old Testament connotations to "hear" and "obey." It is clear to the disciples just whose presence they are in; God's son, the promised Messiah.

So, who exactly Jesus is has been revealed to the disciples and they have finally discovered the truth of the one they have been following. Sometimes, I wish this was so clear on our Presidential Campaign, but we aren't quite as lucky. We have to hash

through the candidates and discover for ourselves who each candidate is and what they represent. And when we do chose the one we like the best, the one we will support - we are told to get up, go out there, and spread the word - make others aware of what it is we believe is right and help bring people to our side - in the long run, get more votes for our team.

As disciples of Christ, the goal is more that of discovery and then living out what we have discovered. Peter and James discovered a great deal about Jesus on that mount of Transfiguration: This man who has come and claimed to be the Son of God, truly is that, ever faithful, ever sure, the one who can and will fulfill all prophecies and ultimately claim salvation for the world. And once they discover this reality in their own lives, they fall to their knees in fear... only to be picked up by Jesus and told to get up and not fear.. Don't be afraid of what you have discovered - live with it - allow it to mean something in your life.

And instead of seeking to sell his case Jesus asks the disciples, "tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." In other words, you may know who I am, but my work is not yet done - the scope of all that I am here to do has not yet been fulfilled - so be careful not to work people into a frenzy before they have a chance to see the depth of my ministry. In his address to us today, we can imagine Jesus saying, "get up, do not be afraid, be sure and ever faithful, that I am the fulfillment first promised through Moses and Elijah and I will indeed go on to do much for the kingdom of God, and for you.

But do not sell me as a mere candidate to lead your people for a few short years, rather, know who I am, believe in me, trust in me, and follow me. I am your God who is ever faithful - And ever sure you can be, that I have come to lead you to the Kingdom. AMEN.