



Minister
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Transfigurations of the Lord
February 26, 2006

Mark 9:2-9

Saying

Intro: Today is Transfiguration Sunday. Our first reading this morning tells of an incredible event that is beyond our comprehension. It is a glimpse of Jesus Christ in his heavenly state, and it is the beginning of Jesus' road to Jerusalem. Our Old Testament lesson tells of another indescribable event as the prophet Elijah is scooped up into heaven, and Elisha begins his role as leader. Let us listen for God's word to us.

What do you say, when you don't know what to say? In Disney's movie "Mary Poppins" the answer is "Supercalifragulisticexpealidocious". The father in the story found himself using that word as the only way to respond to having his whole world turned upside down when he lost his job. While it made him feel better, it only confused those around him. It is fun to say, but no one knows what it means. There are extraordinary times in our lives, moments when we work hard to find words to capture an experience and there is just no way to do it. (We should probably just the expression on our face say it all.)

Have you ever been to a wonderful concert, or had a fantastic meal, or met the perfect someone and then you try to tell someone else about it and they just don't understand?

You may go on and on, and you can just tell, they don't get it? They are not nearly as excited as you are about your experience and no matter what you say, they will just kind of nod and smile at you and say "that's nice" or "I'm glad you had a good time".

As humans living in community we must communicate with each other. There are plenty of times for words. In this information age people want to be able to know everything about anything right there on the spot. On the Internet we can put in a request into a search engine and spend the next four days visiting web sites about any topic under the sun. A whole doctoral thesis can be written without ever leaving a computer terminal. So we are used to having tons of words at our disposal.

Having words at our disposal doesn't mean we can always describe or convey to others what is happening in our heart. There are times in life, mostly these are the big changes in life that come, where we can not find any adequate words to express the moment. Those transition moments when either the joy or the pain is beyond what we experience in our day to day lives, or it may be the kind of thing we have never felt in our life before and we don't know how to describe it. The joy of hearing that one will be a parent for the first time, the excitement of being offered first job that feels like a career, what does a five year old say to the best friend who is moving away to another state, what does one say out loud to describe the sorrow of losing the first parent to death, or the shock of hearing that there is cancer inside one's body and it is beyond medical help? What do you say?

These are times when it may feel like words only fail us. They can not and do not plumb the depth of the feeling that is behind them, yet they are all that can come out. Both of our texts this morning contain huge changes, they are about passing on a vision through changing times. In each of these texts we see faithful people struggle to find words to describe what is happening at these pivotal moments. God is very real and very active and there is no way to capture it with words. In both texts we see one generation preparing the next generation to carry on the life of faith. They are goodbye moments, signifying endings and beginnings. The experience itself is the only way to glimpse the meaning of the event. Those who weren't there can not come close to

understanding what it could have been like, but even with the meagerness of words, we still are moved by the stories.

In a scene that is beyond compare in the Old Testament, Elijah is swept up into heaven, not even taking the time to die first. A fiery chariot just comes down and picks him up. Elijah had told by God that Elisha would succeed him as prophet for Israel. They had spent lots of time together and now it was down to one last day. What do you say on the last day?

Everywhere they went people kept saying to Elisha you know this is the day Elijah is going to die don't you? Yes they both knew. Elijah wanted Elisha to let him wander his last hours alone, and yet Elisha would not. His actions spoke louder than words as he said I want to be with you. I will walk with you. So they traveled together from place to place. Perhaps a few words we shared. We hear of one exchange where a few well chosen words pack a lot of meaning. What do you want most asks Elijah? "A double share of the same spirit that fills you replies the young Elisha. The younger had seen the difference in the older one's life. I want that same thing, that force, that love, that spirit that you have I want that too. Elijah promises him that if he sees him go, if he is there, he will have his desire. If he sees the sign! It is not if you hear the words, if you are there and see me taken, the spirit will remain with you and you will know from the experience itself that it has happened.

And the experience comes, it is dramatic and real, and beyond description. He sees his

friend and mentor enter heaven, and he knows his own life is forever changed. Now he will wear a mantle of leadership that has literally been dropped from the sky to him. He walks over to pick it up. Here too it is the actions above words that speak volumes about what is happening. He puts it on and walks toward his calling. He tried to use words "Father, the chariots! I see them!" All that does is confirm what is happening. Words fail at that point.

In the New Testament, Jesus is beginning to prepare the disciples to carry on after he is gone. He knows that Jerusalem is before him, he knows that soon things will change radically. And the disciples on the mountain top, were part of an experience that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives. It was a gift from God, to see for a brief moment Jesus in his full glory as Christ. They would not know what it meant until after the resurrection. This story is told from the perspective of the disciples, they did not get what was going on, they did not know what to say or do. The experience that Peter and the others had is hard to make sense of. They saw Jesus in a totally different way, they got to peek at what heaven looks like. They knew that much, but they did not know what to say, and they were afraid to say anything for quite some time. Peter tries to say something, and good old Peter manages to put his foot in his mouth saying hey lets build booths and stay up here forever. Let's make a monument to this event. Jesus says no, you don't get it yet. But they did remember what happened. And they knew it was special.

There are so many young people today who are just now coming to discover a sense of spirituality in their lives who look at their parents and grandparents for help trying to describe spiritual things in their lives. They long for help in making sense of what is happening to them and they are looking for words to get a handle on their experience so they may turn to their elders to ask how do you describe these things? They may also say out loud or perhaps just think it, "I wish I had as much faith as they do." Their faith seems to make a difference in their lives. Parents, grandparents, every one of us who has a friend or relative who looks up to us, can share our faith, our conviction that God is with us at all times and help pass on the awareness of the wonderful and mysterious presence of God. We may not know what to say, but even in trying the impression is made, that makes a real difference.

I think particularly those who have lived seven, eight and nine decades of life have marvelous insights to offer. Elisha was so impressed with the faith of his mentor, that he wished for a double portion of the conviction that Elijah had. Those who have seen a good deal of life have a perspective on that which has proved durable and valuable, gently laying aside that which wasn't helpful. Those who have been through some of life's ups and downs and know God's unfailing presence do have a gift that may not be easily articulated, but it is remembered and can be shared. Making that heritage available for whatever use the future generations may have for it, is a gift that will last.

May we be willing to share what we have seen with our eyes, with those who will follow us. However we have seen or felt God in our lives, let us share it with others using words that may not do the full job, but also actions that will speak louder than words. Amen.