

*In the Clouds*

*Shepherd's Grace Church*

*February 10, 2013*

**Luke 9:28-43**

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>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.

<sup>37</sup>On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup>While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

<sup>43</sup>And all were astounded at the greatness of God. (Read also Ex. 34: 29-35)

Last week we talked a little about 1 Corinthians 13. The primary focus then was on the definition of love. Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or arrogant or boastful or rude; love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails. We said this passage is almost extrabiblical. It is so well known for its own content that it is often thought of outside its meaning in the Bible. We commented on how this passage takes on a context of its own when read at weddings. It becomes a definition of love that holds love to a standard that almost takes it out of this world. We also said that from time to time this passage must be re-examined for its context in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Inside the letter, Paul offers chapter 13 not as a definition, but as an instruction. His message is to a group of people who need to be reminded that they must not always put their own needs first. Chapter 13 in Paul's letter admonishes them to look at the needs of others and to recognize that all of God's creation is essential to the coming of God's kingdom! Finally, late in the chapter, Paul gives us a reminder. Now we see through a mirror lit dimly. Then we will see face to face!

As Moses heads up the mountain at Sinai, he desires to see face to face. He wants a meeting with the authentic. Up to this point, Moses sees dimly. He sees a God in a burning bush, in the plagues of Egypt, a God who forces the Egyptians to "let my people go!" He has not yet come to realize that the cloud that goes before the people by day, guiding them and directing their steps is none other than God in God's fullest self! He only sees in part. God however sees in full! God sees completely. God sees the future He intends and works through His chosen to accomplish His will. It is the one true God who is working through Moses.

Earlier in the chapter everyone else is ordered off the mountain but Moses. All are terrified and respect God's command. As Moses heads up the mountain a great cloud covers the mountain and as Moses enters the cloud all the people are terrified. The people know they have committed a great sin against God and are fearful of God's judgment! They expect that God will punish them in the same ways that God punished Pharaoh. They fear for their very lives.

Imagine Moses as he prepares to enter the cloud. He looks back...back down the mountain, down at all the people who are depending on him. He too is fearful for their lives. He knows they have committed a great sin against God, they have made a golden calf and they have complained bitterly since their release from the bondage of Egypt. Imagine Moses as he remembers all their sin and all his encounters with God in the past. He has argued with, angered, and frustrated God with the plight of this worldly people. God has called them a "stubborn and stiff-necked people." Moses thinks perhaps this is the last time God will bear with them, or be with them!

Moses looks back but realizes he cannot go back. The past is in the past and there is no life there! There is only slavery and death. Moses takes that final tentative step...into the cloud...into the future! In that step Moses recognizes once again that this is exactly where God always meets us. God cannot meet us in the past, but only in our future! It is our future that God is carefully planning and orchestrating, hoping we will step boldly forward. In the future is where God always meets us. For Moses, that future was only one step away. For us it is just as close. It is as near as our next breath or the next beat of our heart! Yet the future requires that we take the step! In that step, we accomplish what Moses accomplishes, we meet God!

Moses' meeting with God lasts a long time. He is on the mountain for 14 chapters! He stays as long as he can. His desire is to meet God face to face, however God does not allow that. Early in chapter 34,

God passes before Moses but Moses is only able to see his back. God reminds Moses of exactly who He is. He is the Lord! Slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love lasting to the thousands of generations with punishment only for those who will not repent! This is the God with whom the Israelites are dealing! They are not dealing with a capricious God who acts on the whim of a moment, but with a God who looks at the totality of the work they will accomplish and judges based on the whole of their lives, not just as individuals, but as a people! God's desire is for them to become the fulfillment of His plan, His kingdom. He judges them based on that and that judgment is in the future! It will be fulfilled in the fullness of time!

I believe this point is exactly where our Gospel lesson for today intersects the Hebrew Bible. As you scroll back up and read the passage for this morning, I invite you to notice the similarities in the two stories. Moses goes up the mountain to meet God. Jesus goes up the mountain to pray. Moses goes alone. Jesus withdraws from the others. Moses face changes after talking with God. Jesus face changes after talking with God. A cloud overshadows the mountain where Moses is. A cloud overshadows the mountain where Jesus is. God speaks to Moses, giving him the commandments for the people. God speaks to Peter, James, and John giving them a commandment. The similarities are too striking for the encounter today to be mere coincidence. God wants us to use this encounter to learn a lesson...or should I say, re-learn a lesson!

Look at how Luke tells the story! Eight days after all these sayings...all what sayings? Earlier in Luke's chapter 9 Jesus has asked the disciples who the people say He is. They answer, "some say Elijah, some say one of the prophets, some say John the Baptist." Then Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am." Peter answers, "You are the Messiah!" Jesus then orders them to say nothing about Him and his true function. He orders this because at this point they have a very skewed view of who or what the Messiah is. They believe Messiah will be the one who puts an end to Roman Imperial tyranny. They want to be free to provide for their families and they want that freedom for others. They also want freedom to worship without all the rules and restrictions inflicted by the religious elite! They want this for their friends as well. They do not understand that there is a bigger picture ahead of them. Jesus commands their silence.

After all these sayings, Jesus takes Peter, John and James and goes up on the mountain to pray. While he is there praying, his face changes in appearance. Paul tells us that while we are in this world we do not see one another fully. We see only in part. We know this to be true. No one of us completely knows another. We cannot fully appreciate their difficulties or their trials or their joys in life. We have not walked in their shoes. The disciples have come to know one side of Jesus. Each of them has their own version of that side...but in that moment when Jesus prays they see him fully! He appears to them as Paul reminds us, AS HE IS! He is seen fully even as he fully sees! Part of what God wants to re-teach us this day is that while Jesus is our personal savior, He is also savior of the world! We see him as he reveals himself to us and we love Him for his life in us, but we should never forget that He is also tasked

with a greater mission! He is to redeem all people and all of creation “For God so loved the world that He gave his only son that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have eternal life!”

In the moment of His transfiguration, Jesus does not change who he is for us, but He also opens to us the new reality, a reality of the future, a reality of who He is for all! God’s desire in the transfiguration is to write the message of human possibility on the hearts of all who will hear and see. Peter and his two companions were in a place to see that day. They might have been tired from their journey up the mountain, or from feeding countless numbers who needed them or from the stress of constantly being around crowds and they were tired. They fought through their fatigue however and stayed awake. Because they stayed awake they saw Jesus in His glory! They saw in full.

Jan and Mitch Todd wrote a wonderful song that asks us, “How many mornings will you sleep through the sun (or son) rise, You cant see the light if you’re looking through closed eyes, Flipping through stations for inspiration and it’s all right there if you’ll only see the signs!” Sometimes we are just not very observant, sometimes we are too caught up in other things, but how many times have we missed the truth about God and God’s desire for a relationship with us because we just missed it? For those of us with faith, how often has God asked us to step into that faith .

Peter, James and John saw what was available for them to see because they had their eyes open. They saw the fullness of Jesus’ glory and they saw Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah appeared in Glory as well, for they had been in the continual presence of God. In their Glory they talked to Jesus, encouraging him regarding the conclusion of His ministry. We can only imagine that this was not the conclusion Jesus hoped for...prayed for, but it was the only conclusion possible given the sinful nature of humanity. A perfect sacrifice was necessary. Moses no doubt reminded Jesus of this as he relayed God’s command to prepare the Passover meal. (If you are not familiar with the requirements of that meal, make plans to attend this year’s Seder Supper. Date and time are in this week’s and coming week’s bulletins. They will also appear on the website) Elijah might have recalled for Jesus God’s incredible power in transcending life and death. In any case, they bore the message about Jesus’ departure. Only in Luke’s Gospel is this revealed! Luke specifically wants his readers to know the destination for the journey they join Jesus in.

The message is revealed on the mountaintop! Just as Moses’ received the commandments on the mountaintop, so Jesus also receives His commandment on a mountaintop. The mountaintop is, for me a metaphor of prayer life. When we are able to withdraw, to get away and put ourselves in a place where we can truly listen to God, we find ourselves on the mountaintop. God invites us to come up, to enter His presence and to receive life. You and I may want to say we can never be changed in prayer the way Jesus is. We have nothing in common with Jesus! We cannot be like Him!! This is another lesson God wants us to learn this day! Remember Luke’s continuing and underlying theme in all his Gospel. Anything God can do, Jesus can do. Anything Jesus can do, the church (We) can also do. Jesus went up

the mountain! He withdrew to pray. These are things we do and can do. God invites us constantly and continually! God invites us to step away, to withdraw, to step *Into the Clouds*.

When the cloud overshadows all who are present, scripture tells us all were afraid as they entered the cloud. Jesus, Peter, James, John...all were afraid. Jesus was fearful about his upcoming mission. As a human, he did not want to die. God called him to bravely step into the future, knowing God would be with him every step of the way. If you have ever been afraid of the future, you have something in common with Jesus today.

We have many other things in common with Jesus. We must go to the mountaintop to experience them and there we enter conversation with God! God will meet us there. He will envelop us in His cloud of Glory and invite us to speak to him about our fears, our foibles and our lives fraught with peril. He will speak to us and remind us of his presence and of all He has given us. He will remind us He is with us always. In the end, he will speak to us as He speaks to Peter and his companions. He will say, "This is my son, my chosen one." I have given Him to you as your redeemer, your savior. Get to know him, walk with Him and talk with Him and let Him be your vision of my future with you. "Listen to Him!" He will guide you on the difficult paths of this life!

You and I can find our relationship with God on this mountaintop, in this prayer experience, but...alas, we cannot remain on the mountaintop. Jesus and the disciples went up the mountain, but they could not stay. They had to return to the reality of their world. They went down the mountain just as Moses did. They re-entered the world after being in the very presence of God, they reentered on a Spiritual high and suddenly they were confronted by reality, by great crowds. People surrounded Him, scripture tells us and just then a man called out to him! Isn't that the way? We have been to the mountaintop, we want to share our spiritual expansion with others, tell them of the tremendous high and just then we are confronted, surrounded it seems by issues and people who press in and try to take away our high.

That is another thing we have in common with Jesus. He came down from the mountain perhaps hoping to clarify in the minds of the disciples the true meaning of his Messiahship, but just then he was taken away from what he most wanted to do. Instead he was confronted with the complaints of the world. Do this, don't do that. Look at this, don't look at that! Make sure you have taken care of all your business. It is more important than anything else! These are the issues that confront us every day and if you have ever been confronted by the priorities of others instead of your own, then there is one more thing you have in common with Jesus today!

Just then a person called out to him. You see, not only do priorities get reshuffled, but people demand your time. Jesus wants to celebrate his high but people keep pulling at him. That is the way it is in the world. People keep pulling at us too. The demand our time, want things from us; have little regard for

what we want; are only concerned with what we can give! Often it is even the people whom we do not know well or care to be associated with.

Today, however as we have come down from our mountaintop experience God wants these very people to be a part of our lives. That is another lesson God needs us to re-learn. We are not alone on our journey. When Moses and Elijah confirmed Jesus destination and departure point as Jerusalem, they did not say he would go alone! For those who would journey with Him, Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow. Part of that burden is bearing the reality of the world. Jesus is constantly interrupted, constantly redirected by those who have no idea of all that He is called to accomplish. The man calls out to him, "Heal my child; my only son." That phrase gets Jesus attention. He recognizes the irony in the turn of the word. The man asks for help for his only son while God offers his only son as the ultimate help for the entire world.

Surrounded by great crowds, Jesus asks, "How long must I be with you, how long must I bear with you." Just as God must have wondered the same thing about a stubborn and stiff necked people long ago, now Jesus wonders. Jesus is focused on his mission and asks why am I distracted from what I have to accomplish. Recognizing however that his work is not his alone, he heals the boy and returns him to his father once again understanding once again the irony of the situation. This boy is made well and returned to his father, Jesus will be made to suffer in order to return to his. We see the healing and we marvel at all God is doing! Jesus sees the healing and marvels that we don't respond!

We must go to the mountaintop. We must experience that God given high that comes in prayer and understanding. As we experience this high we are energized for the work God gives us and we are invited to go do it. We cannot, however do it on the mountain top. Just as Moses was called to go back down the mountain and face the people so too are we! Both experiences must be realized in our lives for our salvation to be complete. The world waits on what we have to say.

Even though we are interrupted by issues that get in our way and by people we don't like or want to deal with very much these are the very people and issues God calls us to speak to! God has been clear in his instructions to us, to Moses, to Peter. "This is my son, the chosen one! Listen to Him!" As we go back down the mountain, we listen as Jesus responds to the distractions of his day. He moves into it. He accepts it. He understands that it is a part of the ministry and he embraces it! He doesn't run from it or try to escape it...instead he lives His mission in the midst of it!

Moses steps into the cloud and receives the word of God! When he comes down people are terrified even more than before he went up. They see the change in him and they recognize the power and authority that comes in that change and they are terrified. Moses veils his message to the people so they can hear the part they can live with now, he lets them see through a mirror lit dimly. Jesus also

veils his work. Instead of telling people he is going to the cross to die, he lets them see the great things of God without frightening them away. They see through a mirror lit dimly.

There are those, however who have seen fully. What are we to make of them this morning. Moses has seen clearly, not face to face but certainly the very presence of God. Elijah has seen and experienced the fullness of God's reward. In those days however the men who witnessed Jesus' Glory said nothing about all they had seen and all they had heard.

I am reminded of another group in chapter 2 who were confronted by the same events. In those days, there were shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the Glory of the Lord shone round about them. They were terrified just as Jesus' disciples were terrified. In those days, they left their mountaintop where God had revealed God's grace and love to them! They went into the world and told all who were present at Jesus birth all that they had seen, all they had heard and all that had been made known to them about the child!. Then they left, praising and giving glory to God for all they had seen and all they had heard and all that had been made known to them!

In those days, the disciples kept silent. They were still under the command of Jesus who instructed them to do so. They said nothing because the time was not yet right for them to speak. In the fullness of time however they did speak. In Acts 2 Peter speaks and speaks boldly about the glory made known to him on the mountain top and in the clouds. He invites all to know the work accomplished by Jesus not only in His life, but also in death and resurrection! He learns from his denial of Jesus, from the death of Jesus and from the divinity of Jesus the totality of God's message. This is my son, the chosen! Listen to Him! Peter has learned to listen and in the fullness of time he speaks!

In these days we too are called to step into the clouds. We will be afraid but God is there waiting for us. He meets us in our future and calls us from there to listen to him! He invites us to know the full purpose of Jesus' mission, of his life, death and resurrection. He invites us to know that all these things are necessary for the fulfillment of the scriptures and for the accomplishment of God's will. God invites us *Into the Clouds* so we may be prepared there to return to the world to speak of all we have seen, and all we have heard, and all that has been made known to us! Amen!

**Next Week: Scripture: Luke 4: 1-13. Message: *Following the Footsteps of Jesus to the Negev. We begin our Lenten journey this week in the wilderness. It is a wasteland, seemingly void of life or hope. Here we walk with Jesus as He is tested. What do we experience in the wastelands of our lives? How do we persevere through these difficult times? Come and Worship! Come and See!***