

March 8, 2020

*Sharing the Story...Lent 2*

Shepherd's Grace Church

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. (Matt. 17: 1-9)

Welcome to Lent. Last week we talked about the drill. The standard season of Lent; the same old, same old. You give up something and call it a sacrifice. Most of us give up those things that really don't affect our lives but because we have become so used to having them, we feel as if it is a sacrifice to do without them for 40 days. You take on something. Most of us take on the things we really ought to be doing anyway. We commit to prayer as if we could pray more than we should or we take on an extra devotional, something that will strengthen our relationship with God when the reality is that we ought to be doing everything we can at any time we can for as long as we can to strengthen our relationship with God! That is the drill...the same old, same old, but what if there was more?

What if this year you and I committed to sharing the story. I can already hear your minds churning. I can already imagine you thinking, "I am just not comfortable standing in front of others and sharing the stories of Jesus. That is just not my thing." You know what? I agree...standing in front of others and telling stories is not for everyone. So, what if, instead of standing in front of them we decide to stand beside them, sharing the stories of Lent from a perspective of service and not just of speaking. What if we hear the theme, "Sharing the story" as a double entendre?

Certainly we want to share the stories of Jesus and we should do that as often as we have the chance but what if we share the stories by participating in them. What if we become a part of the story...imagine ourselves in the story...step on the stage with Jesus and invite ourselves to walk with Him as he sets his face toward Jerusalem.

Imagine walking up the mountain to the sermon, down the mountain to the service, around the streets of Capernaum or through the fields of grain. Imagine being a part of the crowd pressing in on him as he feeds the five thousand! This year, "Share the story" by becoming an active participant.

In 2006, I was fortunate enough to travel to many of the places Jesus walked and I had the chance to experience the stories by coming close to the geography that was right in front of me. I cannot take you all with me to the Holy Land this year, but I do hope that one of these years in the not to distant future, we will walk these roads together. Jesus walked this lonesome valley. Nobody else could walk it for him, he had to walk it for himself! Still we travel these roads but we do not walk them by ourselves. (As you read this, hear the tune to "Jesus walked this Lonesome Valley" in your head let the tune fit under the words of this soft rap.")

I have run down the path to the sea of Galilee

I have run the banks of Jordan

Tasted salt from the dead sea

I have run by the seashores of the water spread by God

Jesus walked this lonesome valley and with Him I've always Trod

I have run down the mountain to a place called Philippi

I have run past the gates of hell with Jesus at my side

I have run through the meadows with the blessed and the meek

Jesus walked this lonesome valley and he always runs with me

I have run down the path at the mount of Olivet

I have run on roads where palms are waving yet

I have run up the steps to Pilate's Palace throne

Jesus walked this lonesome valley and I never run alone

I have run the Dolorosa and my tears have stained the path

I have run through the garden where my savior prayed his last

I have run the road to calvary

My own cross did I bear

Jesus walked this lonesome valley and he never left me there

Jesus walked this lonesome valley

He had to walk it by himself

O nobody else could walk it for him

He had to walk it by himself

Jesus walked this world alone so we could walk it with him. This Lenten Season, we invite you to join Him in this journey. Share the story, share the walk, share the passion of this season.

Last week as we journeyed with Paul to Rome, we learned that even before we had law, we knew sin. As I explained on that particular part of the journey, prior to the law, we could not know that we had sinned because the law defines sin. The law tells us right from wrong and yet, prior to the law we could know right from wrong by something else that is given to us.

When Adam and Eve found themselves in the garden ashamed, they were not ashamed in front of each other. They were ashamed because they knew they had disappointed God. They hid together which tells us they were ashamed together and not ashamed of what they saw. They were ashamed because they knew they had done something God asked them not to do. Their shame was before God and they knew it.

If you entered in to that story last week, perhaps you also know of times you have acted in a way that disappointed God. You also know that even in the midst of disappointment, God never stopped loving you. You know that God never leaves or abandons you. You are a part of His never ending story and that story is the story of Love. It is love that lets us know when we disappoint. We do not have to have law. Love reminds us that there is another who puts us above all else. We do not need rules to tell us this, we can see it in the look of the other's eye. Sin misses the mark. It does not violate an ordinance but it fails to find the fullness. Sin is an archery term that means "missing the mark." Love does not miss the mark. Love defines the target. Love is the answer!

Over and over again, we can find ourselves entering the story through the gift of God's Love. Over and over again, we can find ourselves being caught up in God's amazing Grace! Share the story. Be a part of this incredible season and of this incredible journey. Invite yourself in. You won't be sorry. Start today.

When Jesus went up the mountain it was six days later. Six days later than what? If you are entering the story from this point you will have to remember that six days ago, Jesus asked the disciples who they believed him to be. You will remember that in chapter 16 Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Jesus blessed him for the understanding but the two fought over what "being Messiah" means.

If you enter the story from this point, six days later, and you enter with Peter perhaps you recall what it feels like to have an argument with a good friend. Perhaps you remember that for awhile relationships are strained and it often takes awhile for them to

return to normal. This memory will serve you well later in the story but for now, it just might be that you find yourself being a little edgy.

It is hard to fight with someone. It is even harder to fight with one who you care about so deeply. Perhaps it is harder still when you believe passionately that you have the other person's best interest at heart. I believe that when Peter spoke against the cross and death, he believed he had Jesus best interests at heart. I also believe he did not understand that it was death, the death of Jesus that opens the door to life and life eternal, the Grace, the free gift God wants to share with us. While death exercised dominion over us for centuries, Jesus came to take the sting from death and offer a promise of life.

For this reason, six days later Jesus led Peter up to the top of a very high mountain. Perhaps as you hear this phrase repeated for the third time you will recall it is actually the fourth. Remember that it is part of the Hebrew Bible message we read today, the message about Moses who remained isolated from his people for six days while he was on the top of the mountain.

Perhaps as we remember this story, we can begin to understand why Jesus led these disciples up the top of the mountain. For six days, he and Peter had let this argument set and perhaps they had avoided each other because of the tension that existed between them. Perhaps a part of Jesus' decision to take Peter was to settle the tension between them; to remind Peter that he, Jesus was part of a bigger plan.

The tension between these two existed because Peter did not understand exactly what Messiah was. Perhaps he thought it was the agency God would use to eliminate all tyranny in this world. Perhaps he thought it was the way in which God would cure the inequity between rich and poor. We do not know what Peter's image of Messiah was, but we know that it did not square with the work Jesus was called to do.

As you enter the story with this in mind, perhaps you can hear yourself called to go up high on that mountain. Maybe you can remember that this Lenten journey is a place where we learn the true nature of God and where we can set aside the characteristics we want to give to God and begin to receive God as he is. Maybe we can learn together to look past the human characteristics we want to ascribe to the savior and see Him for who he really is!

Maybe as we begin to experience His saving grace, we can look into his face and see the bright shining sunlight of the one who is the very creator of the sun. Maybe we can see the dazzling appearance of Him as the one who planned our redemption and reconciled himself to the reality of the cross.

If you can relate to the story with your very most humanness in mind, maybe you and I can look past the things that hold us back and begin to move forward as we join with Jesus and set our face toward Jerusalem!

If you enter the story from the top of the mountain as James and John do, perhaps you can take a moment to look around. Matthew does not tell us the name of the mountain which is at the center of our story today. Several commentators speculate about which

mountain it is but for me, only one point in Israel makes sense. The highest point in the country is Mount Hermon which rises up nine thousand feet above sea level. Since most of Israel is below sea level, this giant peak stands alone as it's highest peak. The mountain is also just a few miles from Philippi and as you come down that mountain, you walk a path that leads past the point of entrance to the temple of Pan, the goddess who guards the entrance to the gates of hell.

When Jesus acknowledges Peter's response to his question of identity, he praises Peter's response and says that it is upon that knowledge that he will build the Church. He goes on to say that the "gates of hell" will not prevail against it!

When I traveled in Israel, we stayed overnight in Philippi and I ran up the side of that mountain and past the entrance to the temple of Pan. I ran down the mountain and past the very gates of hell! I imagine Jesus talking to his disciples with this entrance squarely in his sights.

I believe that the mountain Jesus led his disciples up was the highest point in Israel and that he led them past the very gates of hell to communicate to them that Messiah was more than just the one who would end tyranny in this world but that he was and is also the one who would overcome the sin and death that was brought into the world through disobedience.

His message to Peter and the others and to us, if we are willing to enter the story is that even the temptations of the devil himself will not prevail against the power of God. His message to us is that Messiah is the one who brings the message of God's grace which goes beyond the law and right to the very Love that is at the heart of God's creation!

In order to enter the story from the point of love, we must also consider entering the story from a place of change. Change is hard for us humans. We do not do it well. We get comfortable and we kind of like things the way they are. For the past several weeks, I have been very frustrated with the new broadcast schedule for the Kansas Jayhawks basketball team. Yesterday, the hawks clinched the big 12 championship for a record 15<sup>th</sup> time in the last 16 years. I was glad the game was finally on ESPN and that it was at a reasonable time in the day. See, the last several weeks, the Jayhawks had been playing on ESPN plus and at 11AM! I had not been able to watch because I refuse to buy one more subscription network. I do not like change in my Jayhawk schedule!

Nevertheless, I do like to watch the basketball! So, in the future, when more and more games will undoubtedly come to pay per view networks, I will undoubtedly relent because at the end, watching the Jayhawks will be more important than my frustration and not being able to watch them where I always have. Still, the idea is appalling!

We do not like change and if you set aside the Jayhawks (as if anyone really could) for just a moment and come back to the story, you will realize that one way to "share the story" this morning is to enter from a perspective of change.

You have heard me say that the disciples do not yet know fully who Jesus is. When he leads them, when he leads us to the top of the high mountain, he is transfigured there

before them. He is transfigured there before us. He is changed. That is what the word transfigured means.

In Greek it is the same word as metamorphosis. It is a removing of the outer to reveal the true inner. Perhaps, the most clear way we can understand it is that when the caterpillar cocoons and becomes a butterfly, the beauty that is revealed is amazing. There was nothing wrong with the appearance of the caterpillar but it cannot compare with the beauty of the butterfly!

Jesus in earthly form was an appealing human. By accounts he was attractive enough, but to see him in the form he is to become is indescribable. It is as the apostle comments in 1Cor. 13. Now we see only in part but then we will see fully even as we have been fully seen.

In order to even anticipate what the disciples saw, we have to be willing to accept change. That change includes changing our understanding of who and what Messiah is. We must recognize that while God has given us scripture to share what the Kingdom to come will be, God is still forced to use human language to describe what we will see. This language, the language we know is woefully inadequate to the events, and sights we will see. We must be open to change in order to anticipate that which is yet to come.

The disciples were privileged to see this change as they stood on the mountain top with Jesus. They saw him shining from the inside out even as they will see him, even as we will see him when we stand face to face with him in his heavenly appearance! Their willingness to follow him up to the top of the mountain, their willingness to change their vocation and be open to something which they did not yet understand brought them face to face with their eternal promise.

If you are willing to accept change and enter into this story from the perspective of change, you can perhaps see Jesus as Jesus really is. He is Messiah, the son of God, the one with whom God is well pleased. You can perceive it in the glow that shines from inside him and you can begin to embrace him even as He desires to embrace you!

The purpose of the transfiguration is to contrast Jesus, the one who possesses the inner glow of the Son of God with Moses who, as we heard earlier in the Hebrew Bible Lesson glowed as a reflection of the presence of God. Moses is on the mountaintop to remind us that his glory is a reflection of the glory of God and that God's glow is the authentic, the original.

The glow of Jesus is the glow of the grace of the father's only son filled with grace and truth. (John 1) and the purpose of Jesus is to share this grace with all of us so that we too might reflect this grace to others. His sharing, as it is being made clear to him on the mountaintop is the sharing of his life so we all might live. Once we understand this, after the Son of Man is raised from the dead, we can then share the fullness of Messiah. Before the cross and the grave, we cannot know or even perceive of the true purpose, but with the change God reveals to us, we can speak, not in part as a child, but in full even as an adult.

There is one final place I want to invite you to consider as an entry point into this story. That point is the very word of God. I alluded to it a moment ago and the revelation of the true Messiah, but I want to expand on it as an entry point.

Think about entering with the disciples into the cloud. Peter is still talking. Jesus is still listening when at once, a bright cloud appeared and engulfed them. God interrupted Peter and began to speak.

Notice what happens when God begins to speak. Everything else is silenced. Peter quits talking. Moses and Elijah disappear. The world fades away and we are left with only the inescapable Word which proceeds from the mouth of God!

If you choose to enter the story from this point, you will need to be very still. Sit with your own situation and your own circumstance and realize that God is about to bring all of God's wisdom right to the place where you are.

This is a daunting proposition! God is speaking to you and you have a choice to make. It must be made in this moment...right now! Are you going to listen or are you going to be distracted by the events of the world?

If you choose to listen, God will reveal to you the plans He has for you. God will share with you that he has a future in store for you, a future filled with promise and hope. (Jer. 29) God will reveal to you that God is not going to move you to a place other than right where you are...that your future begins right here and right now. God will overpower you with a vision for all you can be and all you can do...not through yourself but by the very grace that gives life to the world, through Christ. (Phil. 4)

If you choose to enter the story from this place, you will probably be overcome with fear just as the disciples were. If you choose to make this your entry point, what happens next will be the most profound experience of your life. As you find yourself overcome with fear, Jesus will come to you and touch you. He will call you to stand up!

Your knees will be weak and your mind will be muddled but as He touches you all will become clear. He will say to you stand up and do not be afraid! In his touch, all will be calm and suddenly, all will be clear. Nothing will be missing and nothing will be broken. You will experience the true meaning of shalom.

Just as Jesus is metamorphosed in appearance, so He is also changed in action. He becomes the peace you have always longed for. He becomes the power and presence you know you have always been missing in your life. He becomes everything to the point where in your life there is nothing missing and nothing broken. Suddenly you understand the truth of shalom and as you embrace it, you look around.

Before you were engulfed in a thick cloud. You could not see anything but you knew that you entered with others. Now, you stand and look around and there is no one there but only Jesus. Moses is gone, Elijah is gone. The only one in your presence is Jesus and you recognize that Jesus is all you need.

If you enter the story from this point, you share an experience with others who have been converted by the power of the word of God. If you enter from this point, you realize that as you have run down the paths to the sea of Galilee or past the Jordan River or past the Red Sea you have walked with the living water. You realize that as you have walked past the gates of hell, you fear no evil for God is with you. You realize that as you encounter the path down from the Mount of Olives it is no longer a path to death but to life through Him!

If you enter the story from this point, suddenly you can share the story, share the stage as you walk toward Calvary because suddenly, you know that Calvary is not an end but only a beginning.

Will you enter the story today? Will you Share the stage, share the story with Jesus, the one who is with you when you come to know, when you come to believe that God has a plan for you?

This Lenten season, God is inviting you to walk or run or crawl to Him. Share His story. Share History...the history of God's amazing grace! Amen!