

## **“Get Up and Do Not Be Afraid”**

### **Matthew 17:1-9**

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus gathers three of his disciples – Peter, James and John – and leads them up a mountain, by themselves. While they’re there, Jesus is transfigured before them; his face shines like the sun, and his clothes become dazzling white.

The disciples see the power of Sonlight – the light of the Son of God.

“Transfigured” isn’t a word we come across everyday, probably because jaw dropping changes in appearance don’t happen everyday unless you’re in Hollywood and can afford plastic surgery which is a very different kind of transfiguration.

According to the dictionary to be transfigured is to be transformed, to undergo a metamorphosis, to change in appearance, condition or form.

Jesus goes from being an ordinary Galilean peasant to an extraordinary, “dazzling” figure. The disciples look at him and think, “This is powerful!”

But before they can get a handle on this energy flowing out of Jesus, two men appear to them: Moses and Elijah. These are the Old Testament’s heavy hitters, representing God’s law – Moses and God’s prophecies – Elijah. Both men worked miracles and were considered to be among the few extraordinary leaders who skipped death and were taken directly to heaven. The fact that Jesus is talking to them signals that he’s on their level, with Jesus’ ministry fulfilling what God had been doing through the people of Israel

The disciples think, “This is big!”

Realizing the significance of the moment, Peter says 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.” This is a thoughtful and hospitable impulse, but, of course, it’s a ridiculous offer. Is there any way that someone shining with the intense brightness of the sun could be contained within a dwelling? Jesus is just too powerful. Too big.

Before Jesus can answer, a bright cloud overshadows them, and from the cloud a voice says, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

When the disciples hear this, they fall to the ground, overcome with fear. But Jesus touches them saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they look up, they see no one except Jesus himself, alone.

As the disciples arise, they think to themselves, “This Jesus is the Son – the Son of God. He’s powerful, he’s big, and God wants us to listen to him. And what an effect he has, knocking us down and picking us up!”

“Get up and do not be afraid.” The disciples had fallen to the ground and were overcome with fear when they heard the voice of God claiming Jesus as his Son and telling them to listen to him. Jesus responds, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

On Ash Wednesday this wee, we’ll be handing out our annual Divinity Lenten Devotional in which some of you have written devotionals about how you’ve been knocked down in fear and gotten up again.

“Psalm 27:1 – The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

Why do we find it so hard to believe these words? To allow God’s light to lead us and to be afraid of nothing.

I’ll tell you why. Life is very hard and is full of some very dark places. Depression, illness, death of loved ones, unemployment, debt, the list goes on and on, and can overwhelm us with the weight of fear. When my husband lost his job I thought ‘here we go again back into the pit of darkness.’ The trust was that God’s light never stopped surrounding us, and the blessings were many. Early on when the anxiety attacks tried to take over I found comfort and strength in Paul’s words. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your heart and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7).*

It was not an easy time, and it certainly had its fair share of fear. But, God’s light, in the words of the Bible, His love, through the prayers and support of family and friends, and most of all His peace, which gave us courage, became the stronghold that saw us through it all.

Will I never be afraid again? Probably! But I know where the light is, and where the love can be found, and I have felt the peace of God and welcome Him with open arms.”

“Get up and do not be afraid.”

As our five new Stephen Ministers prepare to be commissioned next Sunday – a story from their training about self-sacrifice in giving care to another person.

Bruce Bickel had been a Navy pilot in Vietnam. He and several other military men had taken under their wing an orphanage about 8 miles from their base. One day, during an enemy mortar and rocket attack, the orphanage was damaged. Bickel drove down to help the children wounded in the attack. He brought a severely injured 8 year-old to an Army hospital. One doctor explained the need for blood, and that the best chance for a match would come if Bickel could persuade some of the unharmed children to donate blood for their friend. Bickel explained the need, and one 10 year-old boy volunteered.

While the blood was being drawn, Bickel held the hand of the boy who was donating his blood. He began to sniffle and asked Bickel something. “What?” Bickel asked, bending his head nearer the boy.

“How long will it take me to die?” the boy repeated. He thought he had volunteered to donate all his blood.

“Get up and do not be afraid.”

Sometimes there is a little bit of fear and trembling when our newly commissioned Stephen Ministers go out to make their first visit with their first care receiver. But they will hear the voice of the servant Christ is whose footsteps they are following. “Get up and do not be afraid.”

Also from our Stephens Ministry training, a story about not fearing death.

Fred and Alexander were baseball fanatics and best friends. Year after year they talked for hours on end about baseball.

As they advanced in years, they became concerned whether there was baseball in heaven or if they would have to live eternally without baseball. So they made a pledge – whoever died first would somehow let the other know whether there was baseball in heaven.

Fred died first. Alexander attended the funeral and wondered whether Fred was no longer forever separated from the game he loved. The very next day, while watching a baseball game on TV, Alexander heard a voice saying, “Alexander, Alexander . . .” He recognized the voice as Fred’s. He asked, “Fred, is it you?”

The voice answered, “Yes, it is. I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?”

Alexander said, “Give me the good news first. Then I’ll be able to stand the bad news.”

“The good news is that there is baseball in heaven.”

“Thank you, Fred. That’s wonderful news,” said Alexander. “Now I can live out the rest of my days in peace. With such great good news, what could be the bad news?”

Fred answered, “You’re pitching tonight!”

“Get up and do not be afraid.”

The final painting of the artist Raphael was his painting of the Transfiguration. He painted it in Rome in 1520. He was 37 years old and not far from death. In fact, he died before he finished. In the background of the painting you can see the village of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus first startled his disciples with the prediction of his suffering and death. In the

upper center of the painting you see a flat, rocky mountain. The three disciples are there shielding their eyes from the glory all around them. Just above them are Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Jesus is shimmering in white and everything in the painting seems drawn toward him. But down at the bottom, at the bottom of the mountain, you see a crowd of disciples. They are trying, but unable, to heal a young boy who suffers from the seizures of epilepsy. Raphael knew his Scripture because in Mark, right after the Transfiguration, Jesus comes down and encounters that boy.

But when you look closely at the child in the painting, you see that his eyes are wide and white and focused on Jesus, and in fact, his right hand is stretched out as far as it will go. You realize that from the depths of this suffering and pain he's trying to reach out and somehow touch the transfigured Jesus.

You can almost hear Jesus saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."

May the peace of God . . .

Sermon - #317 – Jesus On the Mountain Peak

Closing #671 – Shine, Jesus, Shine.