

February 18, 2007

Luke 9:28-43

Sermon: "Having a 'Kodak Moment' with Jesus" Rev. Bob Jack
Text: "*When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.*"

When Carol and I were traveling in Israel a few years ago, the second week of our tour happened to coincide with Pope John Paul's visit to The Holy Land. It was his first time there, as well as our first time, but it caused quite a stir. Security was beefed up beyond the normal high alert that Israelis are used to experiencing as part of their normal routine: More road blocks, more check points, more bomb-sniffing dogs. Everywhere we traveled we bumped into these residual details surrounding the pope's almost casual visit to a tense and terror-driven land.

And then there were the tourists. Or, should I say, 'the groupies.'" An estimated 500,000 extra pilgrims descended on the Holy Land that week, each trying to get close to His Holiness the pope. Many came in from Italy, and these Italian pilgrims were (how shall I say it?) "special." They traveled in pockets of five to ten at a time, and each pocket had someone playing a guitar, or a

mandolin, or a lyre: Traveling, minstrel-singing Italian “groupie” pilgrims. We’d see them in the malls, on the street corners, sitting together at cafes and bistros – shopping, sipping espresso, but always singing. Singing, singing, singing! We didn’t know what they were singing, but they seemed to be having a good time, so we kind of hoped they were singing about Jesus. The State of Israel must have made lots of money on tourism that week.

You and I spend lots of time and money trying to get close to God. We travel near and far to get closer to Jesus. Each year, millions of people make pilgrimages to The Holy Land wanting to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. They break bread at the site where he turned a few loaves of bread and some fish into enough to feed five thousand people. They endure a bumpy ride on a rickety boat just to cross the Sea of Galilee like Jesus did with the disciples. They stand in awe of a large silver-embossed star on a marble floor that covers the place where supposedly Jesus was born. They visit an empty tomb surrounded by a beautiful garden. Just standing on

the sand where Jesus once stood is enough to make us feel closer to Christ.

We all yearn for that glimpse of glory. We want a picture of God and a tangible proof that God is in our lives. If only we could see Christ standing there, right in front of us, in dazzling white robe and tunic!

The Transfiguration is the story of God appearing in a tangible, real way. Jesus takes his three closest disciples up on a mountain hike. When they reach the top, Jesus stops and prays. Peter, James, and John close their eyes, dozing off like (uhhhh!) some of us do in church. While they're asleep, Moses and Elijah join Jesus on the mountain and discuss his future. After a while, the disciples open their eyes, and they see a glorious thing. They see the dazzling white face of Jesus. They see Moses and Elijah standing there, next to Jesus. Everything has a shimmering, glimmering, sparkling white sheen to it.

The transfiguration is a sight to behold. The disciples have been given a rare privilege. James and John stand in awe. They let

the experience penetrate deep into their hearts. But Peter comes up with a plan of his own. He starts thinking out loud about how the moment can be captured. Like a Kodak moment! One of those picture-perfect Kodak moments. He wants to freeze time – make it stand still. He wants Moses, Elijah, and Jesus together in a picture so he can keep that moment forever in his mind.

Whenever you and I have a moment with Jesus – and I hope you can say that you have personally had moments with Jesus at some point in your life – we want those moments to last forever, don't we? Like when we were kids, running barefoot in the grass, trying to catch a firefly or two in a Mason jar, trying to make that little booger last – that firefly, that moment, that experience – make it last forever. Bottle it up and watch it glow for hours and hours. Just like our time with Jesus, we want a tangible God we can take out and hold in our hands whenever the going gets rough. Ever feel that way? Sure.

But that kind of tangible experience doesn't last, does it? At least, not with the same intensity, the same brightness. What

happens when you bottle up a firefly? You either have to let it go, eventually, so it can live, and maybe someone else can catch it and share in that same moment, too. Or, it dies. It goes away.

Despite our desperate cries, our helpless prayers, the tangible touch of God doesn't stay with us long. Just as we were beginning to enjoy the ride, the ride comes to an end. Just as we were appreciating the view from on top of the mountain, the time comes when we have to climb down off the mountain and head home to our normal, everyday lives.

The glory of God comes to the disciples for just a short time, maybe a few minutes. After God speaks, the cloud disappears, and the disciples, climb down the mountain with a plain-clothed, ordinary Jesus. They've seen his real identity. Still, they've barely touched foot on level ground again before they forget his real identity, and things go back to normal again. They've seen the glory of the Lord, but they fail to take hold of that glory once and for all, and be changed by it.

Pretty soon, they'll fall asleep again, this time when the soldiers come for Jesus, to arrest him. And even in the face of the Crucified One, who shows us the glory of the God who can forgive all our sin, they'll all fall away, and deny him, and run for their lives.

Have you ever seen someone's face shine? Ever been to a wedding where the pastor has the bride and groom turn and face the congregation, at the end, and introduce them for the first time as "Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so," and the look on their faces is one of sheer joy? Their faces shine. The two had entered that sanctuary as individual adults with individual agenda and individual goals. Now they're leaving as husband and wife. They've been changed. And it shows.

Or how 'bout a college graduation, when the student is finally handed her diploma? Have you ever been present when a batch of immigrants has just been sworn in as new citizens of the US? Their faces simply shine.

An encounter with Jesus Christ has the power to blow you away. It can make you something different in an instant. Maybe you've had a time when you've been in prayer, and you've felt the hand of God take hold of your tongue and shape your words into the perfect prayer, a prayer that perfectly captured every thought and feeling and aspiration you wanted to express.

Maybe you've been at a loss for words in the face of tragedy, and the Spirit suddenly interceded for you, "with sighs too deep for words" (as the Bible puts it), and you knew things would be fine. Maybe God has entered one of your dark and lonely nights, and filled the room with a warm and mysterious light, and all you could say was, "Thank you, Lord."

God's presence and power are all around us. We see God's presence in the beauty of a morning snowfall, or in the still of an evening rain. We hear God's voice in the plaintive cry of a newborn baby; and sense it in prayers that are answered. We feel God's touch in the gentle embrace of a friend, or in holding hands with the ones we love. We can see, feel, touch, and hear God if

we're earnestly seeking him. If we're open to change. God is with us.

The apostle Paul reminds us, "If anyone is in Christ, [he or she] is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

See . . . feel . . . touch . . . hear . . . Everything has become new.

How do you respond to change? Will you walk down the mountain and into the valley and revert to your old, ordinary ways? Continue to live as a selfish, carefree individual?

Or, will you shine, as Jesus shone? Will you let God clothe you in robes of majesty and glory so that others can see the change in you? Let God's love literally shine through your face to all the world, as evidence of your newfound faith?

You can travel to the Holy Land. You can buy dozens of books on spirituality. You can send lot's of money to charitable causes and television ministries. But your efforts will be entirely wasted if you don't allow God to shine on you, and shine in you,

and shine through you. Unless you're searching results in a new person, a new creation in Christ Jesus, then there's no reason to continue searching. Your searching will be in vain.

Later this week we'll gather in this same sanctuary. And we'll allow our foreheads to be imprinted with ashes formed in the sign of the cross. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of a journey through Lent. And in the Season of Lent you and I will have opportunity to return time and again to the Cross. Lent is a time of searching for Jesus. Lent is a time of drawing closer to Christ. Lent is a time for learning more about Jesus' true identity.

As you and I go searching for Christ, together, let's invite others to make the journey with us. Let's show them what it means to shine with the brightness of Christ. Let's let them see it in our faces. Transfigured. Transformed. Changed.