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God's Word of Encouragement
Mark 9:2-9

Introduction-The Speaker's fear of strange language in his childhood.

In my childhood memory of the second grade at Lincoln Elementary school, Lewistown, Mt., Miss Davis my teacher announced to the class, "Ronald, commence to read."

In all of my 8 year life I had never heard anyone use language like that in my presence. I froze in my seat over-come with fear and confusion. My mind thought that everything outside the school had stopped in midair — cars, pedestrians, airplanes, ambulances - all waiting to see what I would do.

After a long silence a voice from the boy behind me said, "Read, idiot!"

I knew very well the meaning of that comment. It was a command delivered in the imperative mood and it was simple enough for me to obey by simply reading a few words before my eyes.

When the outside world resumed its motion, at last I began . . .No... at last, Ronald commenced to read.

The Fear of the disciples

I was not the only one to be shocked by strange language.

The disciples of Jesus were overcome with fear when Jesus made the first announcement of his upcoming death in Jerusalem just days before the awe inspiring Transfiguration on top of Mount Hermon in the presence of three disciples, Peter, James and John.

They were not frozen in their seats as I was in the second grade, but a sense of dread came over them as they realized that following Jesus involved certain hazards.

These disciples imagined that Jesus would be a triumphant king who would liberate them from Roman government and rule the world from God's triumphant throne along with the chosen people.

Now Jesus says, "The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life."

Sources of fear among the disciples.

If the elders, priests, and teachers have already decided to put Jesus to death, then what will happen to us and to our families?

We have been seen in public with Jesus as he taught, healed and cast out demons. They know who we are.

John the Baptist is in Herod's prison and he is known to be Jesus' cousin.

John the Baptist elevated Jesus above himself.

The Nutty Zealot, Judas Iscariot, believes that by turning Jesus over to the temple authorities it would force Jesus to take up the throne of David and become the Messiah of Israel in majesty and power,,FOREVER.

Whatever happens, this Jesus is dangerous!

The Transfiguration of Jesus

We have seen how fear has caused the followers of Jesus to deny his predictions of impending death. But in spite of their reluctance to believe him, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and his clothes became shining white—

whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Teacher, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.

Then a cloud appeared and covered them its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, "This is my own dear Son—listen to him!" They took a quick look around but they did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them. (Mark 9:2-6)

As they came down the mountain Jesus ordered them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has risen from death."

This Transfiguration is a glorious mystery and is beyond words. Through history those who tried to picture it have only shown the limitation of language. As a listener you can tell that this is a glimpse into the realm above and beyond earth.

Jesus is the central figure on the mountain and Luke tells us that Jesus was praying and as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered. But the prayer of Jesus was not a mechanical or wrote prayer. It was a personal speaking and listening "conversation." Such a prayer made it possible for God to glorify Jesus in this unusual way for a certain occasion. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. This was the loving relationship between God and human kind. After that the relationship was deepened and grown through prayer. The human heart speaks and listens to God through prayer. Just as the glory of God transfigured Jesus, this same glory will transfigure each of us as we open our hearts to God in prayer. It is not something we strive after. The change is an inner gift brought about by the in-dwelling Spirit of our Lord. The radiance of our face and the aura around our bodies tell our story.

We need to remember that Moses and Elijah came and spoke with Jesus as well. They were the Jewish national heroes representing the Law and the Prophets. They came to hearten Jesus, to strengthen Jesus and to hold him up in sympathy. They were companions of God's glory.

We have described the characters who went to the mountain, but let us remember that there are some important things that God was doing on that mountain top.

1. Jesus' career on earth was not going to end on a throne, as the disciples had fondly imagined, but in a cruel and shameful death.

2. The primary outcome of the Transfiguration was God's encouragement of Jesus. The prediction was not only about death but about RESURRECTION ! ..."but three days later he will rise to life. This was God's doing.

3. Another result of this glorious moment was the encouragement of the disciples, whose faith had been nearly shattered by Jesus' announcement of his death.

4. The radiance of Jesus' person, the words from the cloud, and the Divine affection of God for Jesus expressed in those words all served to strengthen Jesus to bear the cross.

5. By the grace of God Jesus tasted death once and for all for the blessing of all human kind. The transfiguration was God's way of preparing Jesus for that gift.

On the Mount, glory and transfiguration came together. Now, as they come down Paul in II Corinthians tells us how to enter that glory.

CONCLUSION

AND WE ALL, WITH UNVEILED FACE, BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF THE LORD, ARE BEING CHANGED INTO HIS LIKENESS FROM ONE DEGREE OF GLORY TO ANOTHER; FOR THIS COMES FROM THE LORD WHO IS THE SPIRIT. (2 Corinthians 3:18)