

## Message: "Hallmarks of Acceptable Foolishness"

### Scripture Lesson: Matthew 17:1-9

17Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>3</sup>Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>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!" <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. <sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup>And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. <sup>9</sup>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."

Sometimes the questions surrounding the scriptural text get the better of me. Take our passage for today, describing the event known as "The Transfiguration." If you don't have questions about this passage, I'm not sure you read it very closely.

Here's one of my questions: how did Peter know those two figures with Jesus were Moses and Elijah? Did he have a portrait of these Old Testament patriarchs and prophets on his fireplace mantel? Did Moses and Elijah have nametags? Were there holy thought balloons hanging over their heads? (I know I should probably not bring up balloons these days.....)

Another question: what does it mean to be transfigured? To glow radioactively? To have an amazing tan? To have washed clothes in hyper-detergent? Or to be wearing clothes of a particular color? (yes, this picture is of a shirt which has a color labeled "Dazzling White")

And yet, another question: why did Peter suggest he build three dwellings for these personages? What kind of dwellings are possible on the top of a high mountain? Did he have in mind gazebos, or tiny homes, or rustic lean-to's? Did he pack one of those ultralight backpacking tents very popular today which they say can be set up in ten minutes but actually take half a day?

And then, more questions: What of the admonition of Jesus to "get up and don't be afraid"? Are you kidding? Something that's completely inexplicable happened; we're still debating what actually happened 2000 years later (as I'm'

demonstrating here), something unusual and unpredictable and uncontrollable going on that could not possibly be contrived by human effort....."don't be afraid?"

The things God does to gain our attention!

There are other questions of a different nature out there as well - why the complexity of the transfiguration? Why the particular details of radiance and dazzling whiteness, Moses and Elijah? If God is always trying to get through to us in holy scripture, certainly there are clearer, more understandable ways? Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Abraham or Noah or Deborah or David or Mary or Jacob? Why the absence of discernable dialogue between the three entities? Why do this in front of some of the more bumbling of disciples?

Again, the things God does to gain our attention!

But our attention needs getting, doesn't it?

Back then no more so than today, for we humans have always had a great deal of trouble keeping our hearts and minds aligned with not only God, but with truth, and with goodness, and with compassion, and with justice, and basically with anything integrity requires; everyday we are witness to how very often we pay attention to the wrong things; we give effort to wars and contention and crime and pollution and inequity but often refrain from taking the steps to correct these ills until they impact us personally, corporately, nationally, or globally. It is often the case that it is only as our attention is diverted radically that we pay a better kind of attention. And even then, it isn't certain our attention will be improved.

Case in point: I don't mean to shock you today, but I need to let you know that this past week, I did something that may make some people uncomfortable, so prepare yourself for a shock. For I need to let you know - this last week, I received a tattoo on my body. Shocking, perhaps, but necessary; it is a tattoo image of two overlapping circles. The circles are very uneven, for they were drawn on my leg to trace out the rate of infection spread in my knee as it did something unpredictable, unexpected, and in my mind unmerited last week - it began to hurt, and grew to hurt so bad I could barely walk. Talk about getting my attention! Two clinic visits and a visit to the emergency room at Community

Hospital were needed to address this situation. I was informed that, had it progressed a day or two longer without attention, I most certainly would have had permanent damage - and could have led to a deep layer infection called necrotizing fasciitis, which is categorized in medical journals as "an extreme emergency." (and yes, I looked it up!)

Sometimes, perhaps most times, we don't pay the right attention to things until something radical happens. Pain interrupts our normal flow of life; fear for a loved one enters our heart; we lose something valuable to us; we find out we were completely wrong about something or someone. It can happen the other way as well - sometimes something radical happens in a wonderful way, something that takes our breath away -- a scene of beauty we didn't expect; a miraculous recovery from cancer; an enemy becoming a friend; a unsolicited word of gratitude for something we did for another. The point is that these unexpected, unpredictable, uncontrollable moments that happen in every life, and I would posit that happen quite regularly, afford us the opportunity to pay a different attention, a better attention, to choose an increased awareness of the things that really matter. Out of the shock and surprise on the mountain top, that better attention was invited by the words God spoke to the anxious disciples: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

And could it not be that all such things happen exactly for this purpose - to challenge the concept of normality and stasis, which is a land God does not tend to dwell in? Maybe this is the answer to not only the Transfiguration scene, but all the scenes in the Bible that surprise us, and all of the experiences that shock us in this present life? To add to the shock a question, "what do you want me to know and learn in what I face, Lord?" I think there is always one consistent answer to that question -- "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Or to translate into today's faith understanding - "Search for me in your experience; I am with you; hear what I have to say; receive what I have to offer; it is what you need." PAY FULL ATTENTION TO ME, to discover that I am paying full attention to you.

After all, wasn't this the entire reason for Jesus?