

The Greatness of God, Luke 9:28-43

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Introduction

We shared with the kids today that for all of the things that are going on this week-end in society, in the church around the world, and in our church right here, the most important thing to remember is that Jesus is God, and Jesus loves you. This is the message of the Evangelical Covenant denomination that formed in 1885, and the message of Elgin Covenant that formed in 1890, 125 years ago.

God's love made Jesus want to go to Jerusalem and to the cross. His mission was to save a faithless and perverse generation from destroying itself. "Faithless and perverse" describes his own generation, and it describes every generation. We need to be saved from the sins that condemn us to eternal death and alienation from God, and we cannot save ourselves. Without grasping onto God who reaches out to us in Christ, we perish. That is just as true today for you and me as it was two thousand years ago when a desperate Dad brought his sick child to Jesus.

Without this message that Jesus is God and Jesus loves you, the other celebrations of this week-end don't amount to much. Society took God's love out of Valentine's Day, but this church, in partnership with Wayside Elgin, is putting God's love back into it, with the annual "Walk-A-Mile in their Shoes" fundraiser which we hosted yesterday. This year let us, at Elgin Covenant keep God in our anniversary, by celebrating God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord God, send Christ to reign in our hearts, that we may be touched by his glory, filled with his love, and inspired for his mission. In Jesus' name, amen.

1. This is my Son

The mystery of how Jesus can be all God and all human at the same time is the anchor of my faith. Yet the Transfiguration story has always bothered me. Why did only three disciples see his transfiguration and then keep it a secret? The Christian faith is established on eye-witness accounts by people whose lives were changed by what they saw. The secrecy of the Transfiguration is the kind of thing that skeptics jump all over. That bothers me.

On reflection I realized that touches from God in the present time—when God is revealed in intense ways through healing; when God washes your soul in light and baptizes you with the Holy Spirit – those things do not usually happen with thousands of people around to watch. Those mostly happen in private, during prayer, when you are unguarded towards God. Around big groups of people we put on our best manners and worry about the impressions we make. It seems that we are most likely to experience the touch of God in divine revelation, when we are either alone or in our most intimate circle where our guards are down and we are focused in prayer. If the Bible only showed God revealed in public in mighty ways, we would not know what to expect when we are alone, and we are each alone a lot, even more than we realize.

People are not usually quick to share their moments of a divine touch, for many reasons. Often a deep humility follows those experiences and people do not want to testify and sound like they are boasting. I have found that the less cautious my acquaintances have been, and the more inclined to boast of spiritual experiences, the more off-the-wall and unbiblical those experiences turn out to be. The Bible's stories of how God touches people's lives give us a framework for what to expect. A true touch from God will not contradict what God has taught in scripture, it will deepen the truths to which the Bible has testified.

Peter, James, and John heard the voice from heaven declare the Sonship of Jesus. They each had the same experience, which was later validated in the resurrection appearances and the final ascension of Jesus Christ. What they experienced in seeing Jesus in glory was confirmed by all that God showed Jesus to be and all that Jesus proved to be when he rose from the dead. So if you feel your soul washed in light and in that experience you are given a blessed assurance of who Jesus Christ is as your divine savior and Lord, your experience is probably authentic. That is a Biblical framework.

We can discern these things, we are commanded to discern these things, because we have received Christ in our hearts and he has given us the Bible to be our guide-book. The good news is that God in Christ loves us so much he has told us what to expect from him even in the moments of surpassing mystery and miraculous holiness when are alone, in prayer, unguarded and vulnerable toward God.

In this year's teaching on the Holy Spirit's work we have seen it over and over that these moments of godly power are the means for equipping followers of Jesus for their mission to the world. The transfiguration was a foretaste of glory divine to encourage Jesus to run the final lap of his ministry, to his goal, Jerusalem, the cross, the defeat of death and Satan, the resurrection, and glory. His transfiguration did not rescue him from suffering, it sent him into suffering, with confidence in the outcome for himself and for the world.

In this special anniversary year, starting with Ash Wednesday, I intend to preach on the work of Christ to reconcile sinners to God. I hope to bring in the insights of those preacher and theologians whose insights helped the Evangelical Covenant Church to take shape as a denomination. This is how we will trace the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, to bring salvation to a world that was and is faithless and perverse.

2. Perverse Generation

The next event in the scriptures is a counterfeit transfiguration; it is the very opposite of heavenly glory. A young boy is possessed by an evil spirit and he is trapped in a living hell. The suffering that Jesus will endure is redemptive, it is part of establishing a new creation. The suffering in the child was not redemptive. It was simply spinning the boy further and further under the power of a devil that controlled him. It was the suffering of the Old Creation, oppressed and needing a savior.

Some try to seize on the descriptions of what is happening here in order to deny the spiritual component of what the boy was suffering. He had epilepsy we say, and satisfy ourselves that somehow that meant his healing is less miraculous or that demons aren't real spirits who are personal, intelligent, and destructive. But when you get right down to the bottom of the issue, we must acknowledge that every form of sickness – every cancer, every kind of nervous condition, every kind of bug and virus that poisons the body – is a symptom of our alienation from God. The child was too young to be at moral fault for the demon inside him, and that is exactly the point: When we reduce sin to moral choices, we begin to think we can be okay with God simply by making more moral choices than immoral choices. But sin and death march on, surfacing in society as injustice, surfacing in the environment as epidemics, surfacing in the gene pool as a weakness in the heart or a susceptibility to cancer.

Read the text. Did the boy have epilepsy? Probably. Did the boy have a demon inside him? Certainly. Were they the same thing? No, but the demon was exploiting and triggering the condition. In the same way not all addicts are possessed by a demon; but very likely some are; not all people with pneumonia are possessed by a demon, but some might be. In that possession

of the boy we find a mirror of the transfiguration of Christ. There Jesus stands in the glory of his eternal spiritual nature. Here is a boy, rolling in a fit in the dirt, in the personal hell of his demon.

Jesus Christ groans in his Spirit over a faithless and perverse generation, and he means all of us together. It may be that some of you were lucky enough to have had a moral compass trained within you by good parents and other circumstances, and the smarts and maturity to measure your choices accordingly. And because of that, you don't think you need Jesus and the ransom of your soul through his blood. Friend, you are no closer to God, no better off in the eternity that awaits you, than that boy possessed by a demon. When the symptoms of your alienation do surface, and you find that your troubles are more than your smarts and maturity can handle, know this: that Jesus is God, and Jesus loves you. Let him be your power and your hope.

Meanwhile those who follow Jesus seem to occupy this place between the Mount of Transfiguration and the demonized boy. They have faith in Jesus and are astonished by his power, but they are intimidated that the boy seems to be resisting every cure, every invocation of the name of Jesus. This describes us too: Believing in God, many having experienced private moments in God's holiness, yet we are still confounded by the spirits and unbelief of our age, and seemingly powerless against its darkness.

I think we are confounded because we covet God's glory for ourselves. Like Peter we want to capture it and build churches around it. We are confounded because we want Christ to honor us for our efforts. Until we are ready for Christ to receive all the glory, until we will be able to say that Christ alone reached into the hearts of the unrepentant, we will continue to be confounded. The Transfiguration is connected to all that comes after: the cross, the resurrection, the exaltation, all the way to the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, when the disciples themselves were no longer confounded, but confident in Christ and their gospel.

Conclusion

Some believers want to live in the Transfiguration story. Christ is glorified, but the suffering has not begun, the Great Commission has not been spoken, and the Spirit has not been poured out on Pentecost for mission to the world. My challenge for us is that this year we as a church shall recognize that we are not a Transfiguration Church, celebrating that Jesus is God but powerless and confounded among unbelievers. Instead, let this congregation know that we are now, and we are becoming, a Pentecost Church, preaching an anointed gospel out of total surrender to Christ, that those who hear it shall repent and believe and give all the glory to God.

Let this be the year, let the time be today, that we recognize that we are missionaries to our world in the power of Pentecost. For this is the power from the Holy Spirit that transfigures each of us through spiritual anointing, washing our souls in light and filling us with divine fire. In this anointing, words simple enough for a child can be understood for the first time:

Jesus is God. Jesus loves you. Amen.