

“Good Decisions Lead to Good Decisions”

Mark 9:2-9

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Frankfort, Kentucky

February 15, 2015

This morning, our attention is drawn to one of the most intriguing events in the life of Christ. It is wrapped in mystery like most divine encounters which occurred on or near a mountain.

We are not sure which mountain Jesus and the disciples went to for this retreat. In the third century, Origen identified Mount Tabor near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth as the location. Evidently Origen and other historians made such a compelling case for Mount Tabor that the Church of Transfiguration was built atop this almost two thousand foot mountain.

On the other hand, Mount Hermon, a few miles northeast of Caesarea Philippi, could have been the place where this divine encounter occurred. This is logical to many since this is the place in the previous passage where Peter made that bold confession of faith declaring Jesus to be the Son of God, and Mount Hermon is almost ten thousand feet high, which fits the description Matthew gives in his version of this story.

If Peter had prevailed in building the shelters he proposed to Jesus that day, we might know the precise location. No doubt those tents or booths would have been turned into monuments which would have drawn pilgrims from around the world after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

The location is really not an important part of this story. What occurred there, the message it conveys, and the function of this experience in the unfolding gospel story are. So, let's examine what happened that day to see what lessons we can glean from it.

Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, John and James, to a mountain to pray. The other nine were left below to listen to people's stories and help them with their struggles.

While Jesus was praying, his appearance dramatically changed. "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them," Mark wrote. Matthew told his readers that Jesus' face "shone like the sun."

Suddenly, Jesus was joined by two other men whom the disciples believed to be Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah, the prophet. The three of them carried on a conversation, and while we do not know exactly what was said, we know they were discussing Jesus' "departure," a reference to his death on the cross.

If Jesus headed to Jerusalem to speak truth to power and confront the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, he would meet with stiff resistance, be arrested and crucified. In other words, he would be treated no differently than the prophets who preceded him, including John the Baptist.

It appears Moses and Elijah confirmed the reception Jesus would receive in Jerusalem, but endorsed his decision to go anyway. This was no time for Jesus to be timid or let fear hold him hostage. Too much was at stake for Jesus to be anything but bold and courageous.

At some point in the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah, Peter blurted out what he thought was a brilliant idea. He offered to build three tents so these men could stay there indefinitely and continue their discussion.

I almost feel sorry for Peter because of what happened next. A cloud descended upon the mountain and a voice interrupted Peter.

"This is my Son, whom I love. **Listen** to him!" Even Peter got that message and quit talking. As a matter of fact, Peter, along with the other two disciples, fell to the ground out of fear and Peter never spoke again.

Knowing the disciples were traumatized, Matthew tells us Jesus went to them, touched them and reassuringly said, "Get up and do not be afraid." As they departed the mountain Jesus ordered them to tell no one about this event until after the resurrection.

Why did Jesus go on this mountain retreat with three of his disciples? He was at a crossroads and needed some guidance so he would make a wise decision.

Was it time for him to shift the focus of his ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem? Why was this such a hard decision to make?

Jesus was loved and appreciated in the northern region of Galilee. For the most part, he had been well received for his good work.

This would not be the case if Jesus chose to migrate south to Jerusalem. There he would encounter strong opposition from the scribes and Pharisees who would not be receptive to his message or methodology. This was because Jesus would expose their hypocrisy and addiction to power, prestige, attention, money and possessions.

Any threat to the kingdom the corrupt religious leaders were building for themselves would be met with threats of their own. Anyone who ignored those threats and continued to speak truth to power would be dealt with harshly. Imprisonment, torture and death were not uncommon, and Jesus knew it.

So, what should Jesus do? Play it safe or move toward the eye of the storm?

It appears most of the people around him, including his own disciples, wanted him to play it safe. This is understandable. They loved Jesus and did not want his life to be threatened, as well as their own.

I think you see why Jesus needed this retreat. He needed time to think, pray and seek the counsel of others.

This is why Moses and Elijah are crucial to this story. They were the two most revered prophets and leaders in Israel's storied past. They had also faced tough choices and big challenges. Their advice would carry a lot of weight.

Evidently, they encouraged Jesus to proceed with his plans to move toward Jerusalem and become the bold and courageous prophet the common and often forgotten people so desperately needed. Looking back, we know this is what Jesus did. He took the road less traveled because he took this decision seriously and sought the will of God and counsel of others.

Who needs you to take decisions this seriously? Whose life hangs in the balance by what you decide? Who needs you to take the road less traveled and pursue justice with the passion of Moses, Elijah and Jesus? Who needs you to enter into their struggle and bring all your influence to the table on their behalf?

Where do you need to go to clear your mind and think? Who do you need to include in this process? Whose counsel do you need to seek and whose voices do you need to hear?

It is never too late to do good things and change the course of your life and influence others. With God's help, you and I can make a difference in people's lives every day.

I must tell you my favorite part of this story revolves around Peter. To be candid with you, he comes across as a bumbling idiot.

"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Was he trying to be helpful? Perhaps. Mark said he spoke out of fear and the need to say something, even if it was wrong, which it was.

It didn't take long for Peter to figure out his good idea was not so good after all. A heavy cloud descended upon the mountain, and a voice came from the cloud.

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

I think Peter got the message. He never said another word.

Why do I like this part of the story so much? Who among us hasn't done what Peter did? I take great comfort in the leader of Jesus' disciples getting slammed to the floor because he couldn't be quiet.

Peter's time to talk would come, and it did, but it was not then. It was time to listen and learn, to observe and remember.

Why do you think Jesus took Peter, James and John with him on that mountain? I'm sure he valued their company. This was why he selected them as a part of his inner circle.

Maybe he took them, though, because this was a teachable moment which would never return. He didn't need to hear their opinion on what he should do. They had already made that clear. He needed them to see how he made tough decisions so they would follow his lead when they faced tough choices.

Good decisions lead to good decisions. When you pray for God's guidance and seek the counsel of others who are in tune with God's dreams for this world, you are more likely to make good decisions and have something to say others need to hear.

The time would come when God would tell people to listen to Peter, but it was not then. It was time for Peter to go through his own transformation by listening to Jesus and learning everything he could from Jesus while he was with him. Then he would have something to say people needed to hear.

What do you need to do to have something to say other people need to hear? When you speak, does God proudly say, "This is my child whom I love dearly," or does God cringe and cry out of embarrassment? Do you think God encourages people to listen to you?

Why was God so proud of Jesus and why did God want Peter to listen to him? Jesus knew the heart and nature of God and reflected them in everything he said and did.

Jesus offered an alternative vision for the world, one which valued love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over war.

Jesus, like God, was passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, finding the forgotten, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, loving the unlovely, giving courage to those who are afraid, enabling people to achieve their potential, forgiving people who made mistakes, giving people a second chance, teaching people how to live peaceably with one another and inspiring people to build bridges of goodwill, understanding and reconciliation instead of walls of suspicion and hate.

These were the things Jesus did everywhere he went, and they are the same things God calls us to do. When we do, we'll find our voices. I did.

This was what Peter needed to learn before he earned the right to speak. It is what we need to learn, also, and I hope we are.

Each time you and I speak, I want God to be as proud of us as He was Jesus. Every time we come to a crossroads, I want us to make wise decisions and be good role models.

What do you need to do this week to make this happen?