

Shiny Happy People

Here's a chance to breath a little, after a couple weeks of really challenging things from Jesus, we finally get a chance to sit back and bask in the mountaintop radiance of the transfiguration. After the challenge to love your enemy and after the upside down blessings, here you can just stand in awe of Moses and Elijah and Jesus all being special together.

Okay, done? The voice from heaven says that we should listen to Jesus and we're right back to the love your enemies thing, but now we have direct confirmation that Jesus is not, in fact, a crazy person, that he is, in fact, chosen, and that we must, in fact, listen to him. But I want to talk about the shiny thing, because it gives us at least a glimpse into why we would want to follow Jesus on this rather difficult road. What is the deal with the light? It's not the only time it shows up. It happens to Moses, he spends some time listening to God and he comes back glowing so bad people tell him to cover up because it creeps them out. And Saul encounters the light on the road to Damascus and it blinds him for days and changes his life forever. Even here the disciples are not entirely sure what to make of it, they're a little bit terrified, and they don't talk about it until much later.

I want you to go back a bit and remember that, for the longest time, folks absolutely believed that you could not see God and live. So maybe this light is not quite so happy an occasion as we might think. If you think that this is a sort of warm glow, or a nice fuzzy feeling, notice that people are terrified by it. The Israelites make Moses wear a veil, the Disciples are struck with fear and awe. Peter, for a minute, thinks that he might want to set up shop and just hang out there, but even he, in his impetuousness, realizes that this is not a place to stay. When they come back down, they don't speak about this, because they know that this light, this blazing moment on the mountain, the cloud and the voice of God, they're things that will make them sound like crazy people.

That's sort of the limitation of these mountaintop experiences, you can't make others see what you saw or feel what you felt. Paul mentions his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus in terms of the change that it worked in his life, he does not try to describe the light, or how it felt to be directly in the presence of God. This light changes things, but it's not like the things that make ordinary people into superheroes. The change is different. This light is a revelation, it lets people see things as they really are, and once you see things as they really are, you are changed. They saw Jesus in his glory, as he is and was and will be always in perfect relationship with God. They saw Jesus, standing with Moses and Elijah, and they just knew who it was (how did they know that, they had never seen Moses or Elijah). It was a revealing of the truth of things.

But it's not always enough to just know the truth, the path of becoming a disciple is about becoming a witness to the truth, and testifying to the light. The light just transfigures, reveals what is there, but the Spirit, the Voice of God, and the presence of the non-shiny Jesus calling us to follow that transforms. The light, and your experience of the light might keep you aware of the reality of God's presence, but the really crucial thing for us in the here and now, is what do we do when we go back down the mountain? How do we live, knowing that the light is real, that the voice of God has told us to listen to Jesus?

It bears acknowledgement that there are only a few of these shining moments of revelation in the Gospels. Jesus' baptism and the transfiguration are clearly the exception rather than the rule, and neither moment is presented as something that really tipped the balance from unbelief to faith. They are, as religious experiences tend to be, glorious and unforgettable, but unless you follow the

instructions that the voice of God gives you in that moment... This is like that moment when you're putting together a pretty simple piece of furniture and you realize that you really should read that instruction booklet, even if you think it's obvious. This is that little link at the bottom of a webpage that says "more." The light of revelation, on its own probably wouldn't have amounted to much, but when you pair it with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, and you recognize that those folks are reliable witnesses to the light, then you start to get something that is much more concrete and far less vague than some general spirituality that might have its own interpretation of the light.

Specifics are important, because God is one. Specifics are important because Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Specifics are important because this table has a very certain meaning and it reminds us of some very specific things: a life, a death and a resurrection, things we will all have someday.