

## *“Listening to the Beloved”*

Mark 9:2-9  
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February 14, 2021

One of the hardest things about hard things is that we often don't know how long we have to go, how much time is left until things feel or get better or at least less hard. We can't elevate ourselves to see how long the tunnel is, or how much further we have to descend into the valley. If you are told you are going to run a long race but won't know when you begin if “long” means 5, 10, 26 or 50 miles, you won't be able to do the mental work one does in a race, expecting the low points, marking it go by in quarter, thirds, halves, setting a solid pace, sprinting towards the finish. The best approach would probably be just to put one foot in front of the other until you get to the finish.

Anyone who experiences chronic depression might relate the challenge of not knowing how long, episodes will last when one is in them. Same with not knowing when chronic or recurring pain will subside. Or acute grief where everyday functioning feels impossible will lessen. Times of job searching when nothing is coming together, wanting a relationship to come into your life hoping to get pregnant and struggling. In all of these, if someone came to you and said that they have seen your future, and your depression will start lifting in one week, the chronic pain ends tomorrow, your grief will lighten in three weeks, you will get a job in a month, that relationship will arrive in six, get pregnant in three, even though you are still in the midst of that challenge, it would be a great comfort to know where you are in it.

The pandemic has been so tough because we have simultaneously lost a sense of time through disruption of our routines and no one has been able to predict when things will get better, however we define that. I read a post that said the closer we get towards the possibility of the end of this tunnel, the more we realize just how dark the tunnel has been. Many of my meetings this past week have included how difficult February is in a “regular” year, and now this one is the worst of the worst. This has clearly been a view for some time, as William Shakespeare has a character say in *Much Ado About Nothing*, “what's the matter that you have such a February face, full of frost, of storm, of cloudiness?” For those of us with February faces this February, we at least can mark how far we are through it, which today on the 14<sup>th</sup> is exactly half.

The first thing I read in the Gospel of Mark commentary on the Transfiguration said it is the halfway point of Mark's Gospel (*New Interpreter's Bible*), 8 chapters before and this is the beginning of the 8 chapters after.

Halfway between the baptism – a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” in Chapter 1 and the announcement of the resurrection in Chapter 16, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” Here at the transfiguration in Mark 9, another voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Halfway through the written words of the gospel doesn't really match up with halfway through the days of Jesus earthly ministry, but at Bible Study this week we considered how Jesus, unlike us, is able to know exactly where he is in his journey. He can see the whole where we only see part, the full length of a tunnel, the lowest depth of a valley. And here Jesus is about to make a full turn towards Jerusalem and what awaits him there, which he also knows. He is starting to prepare his disciples about his death, in the previous conversation he had about that with his disciples it ended with his words to Peter “get behind me Satan.” So those conversations are not going well at this point, which might be why Jesus doesn't want these three disciples in Mark 9, Peter, James and John, to share what they saw on the mountain.... yet – until after Jesus is raised from the dead and they can put all the pieces together. Some things just can't make sense until they do.

That Jesus knows he is going to die is one of the most haunting aspects of his being God and man, something that my earthly mind can't really comprehend, but also something that calls our hearts to respond to love him all the more for his eyes-open love for us. The one who can see all of time in a way we can't, who knows that Peter is about to say the wrong thing on the mountain, and that is also not going to be the worst thing Peter does, who knows all of my and our wrong and worst things, never says, “honestly, why am I going to all the trouble for Peter, for Jen, for you?” This eyes-open love makes Valentine's and transfiguration day a good match: Jesus knew he was going to die and that he would do so out of love for those who would never be able to love him back equal to that love. But would try, which he also knows.

In Bible Study we wondered together, who was the transfiguration for? Maybe not the three disciples who didn't understand it and then were told not to talk about it - – assuming they kept the secret, we chuckled imagining Peter, James and John casually mentioning after the resurrection that they saw Jesus on a mountain in a dazzling white robe, you know, just talking to Moses and Elijah, and the disciples being like “wait what”? “Isn't that something that could have been helpful to know before now?” So maybe not the three, and there was no crowd, that left us with this thought: it was for Jesus: For Jesus as God and human to be in perfect harmony – earthly body filled with heavenly glory, encouragement from the father, This is my Son, the Beloved – the father who would love him equal to his love and vice versa, for the gift of talking with Moses and Elijah who could relate their own experiences of people not getting what they were trying to do or say. A needed reminder as he saw the approach of the death of his earthly form that he has another: as we hear described in Philippians 2:6-8 “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied

himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.”

At the halfway point of the Gospel Jesus gets a halftime with the Father, a physical reminder of his glory, and time Moses and Elijah, representatives of the Law and the Prophets of faith. Things will still be hard when he comes down that mountain, and in fact they will get harder, but they are easier when Jesus is reminded he is not alone, that he is the Beloved Son, that he is on the path of obedience. The transfiguration is for Jesus and it is for us: Which is clear anytime the scripture includes the command to “Listen to Him!” Maybe especially, like in Peter’s case here, when we are doing more anxious talking or interrupting than open-hearted listening to Jesus, the Beloved Son.

If we are listening, Jesus has some things to tell us in the beginning, middle, or towards the end of all that is hard for us. That he sees more than we can and he sees us, in whatever we go through, and wherever we are in it, we are never lost to him even when we feel lost. That Jesus stays steady toward the cross and into redeemed life and nothing he knows we will get wrong makes him change course. That breaks to be in God’s presence, to be reminded of God’s majesty and glory, can sometimes be what gives us the strength for the unknown length of the next valley. That some things just won’t make sense until they do, until we have the last puzzle piece of joining Jesus in the resurrection from the dead and see fully the glory that is to come. If we are listening. Let us pray.