

“Bringing the Extraordinary into the Ordinary”

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February 26, 2017

[Matthew 17:1-9](#)

{[Charlie Brown video](#)}

When you hear stories like the disciples seeing Jesus' face shining like the sun, do you ever feel like Charlie Brown? I do. Compared to the religious experience of others, sometimes it seems that my experiences are pretty simple and plain and ordinary. Other people are seeing the apostle Paul and the stoning of Stephen in the clouds, and sometimes I'm seeing a ducky and a horsie. I have not experienced any spectacular moments with blinding lights or audible voices from the heavens. I have often told people that, in moments of discernment, I want the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus, *without the being blinded part*, that is. However, there have been no mystical experiences for me. I'm intrigued by those who have experienced them, but my experience has been much more mundane – worship, singing hymns, prayers, and Bible reading. No bright lights; no voices. Maybe you've experienced them, but I haven't. Why not? Why can't I have the dramatic moment on the mountain like the disciples?

And what a moment it was! Mountains are often the place where the divine comes close. I love the Celtic term “thin places” – places where the veil between this world and the eternal world is especially transparent. Abraham and Isaac went up into the mountains and heard the angel of the Lord. Moses experienced the burning bush on Horeb, the mountain of God. In fact, Moses went up the mountain to hear from God directly often. When he came down from the mountain after seeing the glory of the Lord, His face was so bright he had to cover it with a veil. In Matthew, Jesus goes up to the mountain to preach his Sermon on the Mount. There are many examples in the scriptures where marvelous things take place on the mountain. So, the disciples should have guessed that something was up when Jesus asked them to go up the mountain with him.

Something was definitely up. They got to see Jesus' face shining like the sun, and His clothes were dazzling white. And then there are Moses and Elijah, chatting up Jesus. Peter, good ole impulsive Peter can't just stand there and take in the scene, as perhaps he really should have

done. Instead, he blurts out, “Hey, Jesus! It sure is good that we are all here!” I wonder if, in that moment, Jesus disagreed with Peter’s analysis. Perhaps Jesus thought, “No, Peter, it really *isn’t* so good that you are here right now.” Perhaps Jesus second-guessed His decision to bring Peter along for this moment. But Peter keeps going, “OK, here’s what we should do – let’s construct some buildings here, some places for you three to stay.” Maybe Peter thought this could be a great place for them to hang out and receive visitors. It could be an ongoing tourist attraction. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah could have a permanent place to stay, and the people could just come to them. *It’ll be great. We’ll sell tickets and have food vendors and entertainment for the people waiting in line to get autographs. We’ll have a whole Bible theme park here. People will come from all around.*

I can’t really blame Peter. Not having had such an experience myself, I can’t say how I’d respond, but it might have looked a whole lot like Peter’s response. As a parent, I am very often captivated by the little things my children say and do. Quite often, my first impulse is to reach for the camera. I want something to commemorate what has happened. I want to remember the moment, by looking back on the pictures or video, when sometimes it would be better to just sit and absorb the moment. Perhaps my memories will be better developed by being fully present, rather than by snapping a photo. It is the way we humans do, though. We build monuments of all types to what has been, rather than absorbing the moments of life and incorporating them into what we are as we move forward. Video and pictures of the moments are good *sometimes* as a way to remember, but in other times, we really should just be fully in the moment.

That’s what God was calling these disciples to do. Take this glimpse of Jesus’ glory, and don’t build monuments to it, instead incorporate it into who you are going forward. Perhaps the moment itself is not the important part. Perhaps hearing the voice or seeing the vision is remarkable, but it is fleeting. Perhaps the important thing is what we do in the aftermath. Peter wanted to hold on to the moment, but while he was saying this, he was interrupted by a voice from God. I love this moment. The text doesn’t tell us what Jesus does. Maybe He was standing there with his jaw dropped at Peter’s suggestion because it is God in heaven who intervenes. The text says, “While [Peter] was still speaking...” God envelopes them in a cloud and booms out, “This is my Son!” That’s right, God *interrupts* Peter. Even *God’s* patience runs thin. Stop talking and take in this moment! God said “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” Wait a minute! What’s that again? Did God say “Hey, check out the cool lighting effects!”? No, God said *listen to Jesus*. We’re drawn to the visuals of this scene. Jesus’ face shines like the sun and His clothes become dazzling white. That’s what we think of, but that was not the important part –

the important part was what follows. The important part was the *listening*. God said “This is my Beloved Son – *listen to him!*” And that would continue long after they came down from the mountain, and that takes part for each of us wherever we find ourselves – on the mountain or in the valley.

Peter said “Lord, it is good for us to be here” and despite Peter’s impetuous nature, I think it was good. It was good for them to be there for that mountaintop experience. But it would not be good for them to *stay* there. When the occasional mountaintop experience takes place, it is to prepare us for ministry, not on the mountaintop, but in the valley. We must descend the mountain and *listen* to Jesus to lead us through ministry with those in need. We listen to the words of Jesus, through scripture and prayer. We listen to the wisdom and experiences of those around us and how they are hearing the voice of God. We listen and then we *act*. The folly of Peter’s words is that building monuments up on the mountaintop would only distract and take time away from the real mission that Jesus had for him. There were sick people to heal and lost people who needed to hear the good news. Staying on the mountaintop wouldn’t accomplish the ministry that God had for them.

When you’ve experienced the mountaintop, the temptation is to stay there. For me, though I’ve not seen bright lights or heard audible voices, what “mountaintop” experiences I *have* experienced generally have come on some sort of retreat, whether it be church camp or conferences or spiritual retreats. Getting away from the everyday, mundane world often helps to get a sense of clarity. It helps to focus your mind on the tasks ahead. Combine that with some really powerful worship experiences or even just some really great experiences of nature, and you’ve got a mountaintop experience. And, just like Peter, I’ve wanted to stay on the mountaintop. But staying on the mountaintop means staying out of the ordinary, which is where God called most of us to ministry. Most of our ministry is not serving others in exotic or faraway worlds. Most of us are serving others in the everyday situations of our lives. We have to focus the energy and drive from the mountaintop on the ministries of our neighborhoods. Spreading the gospel, serving those in need, visiting the captive. This is where we are called to work.

We need to listen to what is around us, for we will find the voice of Jesus in our interactions with others. We will find the voice of Jesus in the songs of the birds. We will find the voice of Jesus in the cry of the poor. We will find the voice of Jesus in the pages of Scripture. *Listen to him!* That is God’s command for us. Through the cacophony of this world – with so many voices calling for our attention, we listen for the still, small voice of Jesus. When we slow down enough to truly hear what He has to say to us and take those dazzling mountaintop experiences with us as we go

through our lives, we will be more attuned to the voice of Jesus. We must enjoy our moments communing with God and then use them to shape what we do in this earthly realm. We don't have to have flashes of light or audible voices from above – we've got the Word of God printed on our hearts. It is up to us to show others the love of God through our everyday lives, down here in the valleys. Amen.