

## The Greatness of God

### Luke 9:28-43a

#### Introduction

Reading today's Gospel text immediately made me think about a typical dinner conversation at our house. I suspect most of you regularly have or had this same conversation at your house too.

Picture this scene: I imagine the disciples sitting around the campfire on the evening after the events described in today's Gospel reading. Since the miracle of feeding the 5,000 happened earlier in this chapter, we know there were 12 baskets of food available, so I figure they are eating leftover loaves and fish.

As the dinner was progressing, someone – my guess it was Jesus – said ...

Tell me about your day.

Well, never at a loss for words, Peter jumped right in. James and John were also talkers, so they immediately joined the conversation. All of them were talking over each other with great excitement.

- It was amazing! You guys really missed out!
- We were taking a nap at the top of Mt Hermon, when all of the sudden a bright light woke us up.
- And there we saw Jesus talking with – get this – Moses and Elijah.
- The glory of God was everywhere!
- We saw it with our own eyes! This has been the best day of our lives.

The other nine disciples were not quite as eager to share, but they too had a story to tell and Jesus prompted them to tell it. They said:

- Well, while you guys were taking a nap on the mountain, we were down here trying to corral this great big crowd that's been following us around. They were hungry again and wanted us to cater another meal for them.
- That was bad enough, but then this man pushed his way to the front of the crowd. He brought his little boy with him.
- We were about to tell him to get back in line when the boy went into a major seizure.
- He dropped to the ground right in front of us and started to foam at the mouth. It was terrible!
- Then the dad starts to scream at us to "Do something!"
- He told us the boy does this all day long because he is possessed by an evil spirit.
- He kept screaming over and over again: "Please help us! This demon is destroying our lives!"
- Nothing we tried worked. It was awful. This has been the worst day of our lives.

If we were to go around the sanctuary this morning, and ask each other that dinner conversation starter question, we would quickly discover a similar pattern.

- For some of you, this was a great week!

- For others, not so much.
  - For example, for a friend of mine, both his furnace and hot water heater quit working and his car wouldn't start – all in about a 48-hour time span of time.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, and a lot of the sermons that will be preached from pulpits today will talk about the differences between mountaintop experiences and those in the valley. Both of those extremes happen. I will never question that. I can tell you from personal experience about any number of experiences on both ends of that spectrum.

- Instead I am going to present my thoughts in terms that are not quite as extreme.
- I want us to think not just about mountains and valleys, but also about good days and bad days...
  - Days when the presence of God is unquestionable and days when we feel like we are fighting the battle all alone.

I am always fascinated in how the Gospel writers position their stories. Their placement is part of a grand design to teach you something in how those stories interplay.

- Luke does it here in today's lesson. In the first nine verses, Jesus is "transfigured" when He meets with Moses and Elijah – it's a great moment
- But then Luke follows with a heartbreaking situation in the last seven verses.

In fact the entire 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke feels like a roller coaster ride. Up and down. Good days and bad days.

Real life is filled with good days and bad days, with REALLY good days and REALLY bad days.

- There are days when you know God is with you. You can see it – just as if a bright light has awakened you from your sleep.
- And there are days when the problems are big and you feel all alone and you wish you COULD sleep.

So from this text, let me make three observations:

### **OBSERVATION #1: LIFE IS FILLED WITH BOTH GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS**

Both happen, even for the person who walks in faith with Jesus. And both play an important role in the development of our faith.

The good days – those mountain tops – are times when God gets our full attention.

1. In those times we are filled with a sense that God knows us and loves us – that we are indeed His children.
2. Those are the moments when God often gives us direction for our lives. Those things we have been praying about – those questions we have...
  - a. In this moments God makes His will clear.
  - b. To use the imagery of this text it is as if a "light" comes on.

- c. You will find that many missionaries and pastors receive their callings in moments like these.
  - d. My own personal call to ministry came in one such moment on June 30 1972.
3. These good times become the moments make us determined to follow Jesus even more closely.

We need those moments in our spiritual journey, but God never intends for us to stay there. That was Peter's problem in our text. Remember?

As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) (Luke 9:33)

The bad days – those valleys – are where spiritual growth happens.

1. In those places, we get a chance to put into practice everything we have learned as we have walked with Jesus.
2. Those valley days bring us to where the people are – the people who need Jesus – who need people who know Jesus.
3. It is in those valley days where God can work in us and through us to meet the real life needs of everyday people.
  - a. It is in the valley – in those bad days – when I cry out to God about the deep needs my life – just like the father in our Gospel text did.

## **OBSERVATION #2: YOU NEED BOTH IN YOUR LIFE**

Not only do both happen, you need both.

When I came to this point in my sermon preparation, I typed these words ...

I wish I could tell you that life with Jesus was lived only on the mountains.

But as I looked at those words on my computer screen, I realized that "I don't wish that at all."

- Looking back over my notes reminded me that spiritual growth and real life ministry happens -- not on the mountain, but in the valley.
- If I wished you only mountains, you might be happy, but you would be weak and ineffective in your faith.

Let me put it in a way that speaks to my very core:

Man cannot live on chocolate chip cookies alone.

But we try, don't we? Maybe I should make it personal. I try.

One commentator I read this week made this observation:

We have a fatal fascination for the fabulous. Religiously speaking, we are hooked on spiritual ecstasy. (Bruce Larson)

We want the mountains, not the valleys. The good days, not the bad one. The cookies, not the veggies.

- We get hooked on the emotional highs and do our best to avoid the lows of the valley.
- Wouldn't we all rather hang out with Moses than stand face-to-face with a little boy's demon?

But the story of Jesus – and the way Luke aligned these stories for us – point out clearly that you can't have only one. Life with Jesus includes both mountains and valleys. You can't have one without the other.

### **OBSERVATION #3: BOTH DEMONSTRATE THE GREATNESS OF GOD**

Look with me at verse 43:

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. (Luke 9:43)

Now let me ask you ... Where in these two stories is that verse recorded?

- Was it on the mountain with the bright light and the two great men of faith talking with Jesus?
- Or was it down in the valley in front of a hungry crowd and a screaming dad?

Verse 43 was the last verse I read. While it could be applied to each story, it is recorded as a part of the story in the valley.

There is a lesson we need to learn here.

We need to be reminded frequently that God is great in the valley too.

One of the reasons we like the mountain so much is that is easy to find Jesus there. Just look for the bright light.

- But when the crowd is complaining, and the boy is thrashing on the ground, and the father is screaming, it is hard to find Jesus. He IS there. Of course He is there.
- Jesus is always with us.

### **APPLICATION**

I found this wonderful story that makes a fitting conclusion for this sermon. It is the story of a Krispy Kreme donut:

How many of you enjoy a freshly baked Krispy Kreme donut?

Many of us have tasted them. Some people will line up and wait for hours to purchase these sweet delights. Do you ever wonder how they are made? Let me tell you about the process?

First little balls of dough are shot through with a piercing blast of air to create the hole in the center.

- Then they go into a proof box where they ride up and down an elevator in an atmosphere of intense heat and humidity. This causes the dough to rise.
- After this, they are dropped into hot oil and boiled thoroughly.
- Once they survive this ordeal, the donuts pass through a cascading waterfall of icing.

Does you ever feel like a Krispy Kreme donut? Do you know what it feels like to have been blasted with air and boiled in oil?

Well, remember that these experiences are necessary before you get the sweet delight that follows.

None of us look forward to trials. None of us love hardship. But without them, we will never enjoy the sweet fruit of maturity.

Billy Graham said,

Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys. (Billy Graham)

Amen.