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“Just Jesus”

Text: Mark 9:2-9; 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6; 2 Kings 2:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**A** *nd suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.*

What a bummer, right? No more glory. No more Moses. No more Elijah. No more celestial conversation. No more cloud. No more voice. No more chance that maybe, just maybe, they could stay there. Back to Jesus. Just Jesus. Only Jesus. Plain old Jesus.

But this scene, the Transfiguration, as we call it, shows us that Jesus is *never* plain old Jesus. Looks can be deceiving. Sure, He looked like any other first century Jew. But as we have heard this Epiphany season, He was anything but. He spoke with authority - unlike the other teachers. He cast out demons. He healed diseases. This ordinary looking man was really quite extraordinary. Peter, James, and John, they knew it before. But now they got to see it. And the sight of it *terrified* them.

So maybe it was a relief when they looked up and looked around and *no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only*. But this scene, they would remember. How could they not?

And I'm sure they wished for it back, from time to time. Like, when the Scribes and Pharisees began plotting against Jesus again. When in the Garden of Gethsemane the soldiers and guards came out to arrest Him. When Pilate scourged Him so brutally, and then when He was hanging on the cross. . . . Maybe with a tear running down their cheeks they thought: Show 'em, Jesus! Show them who you really are. *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*. Terrify them with Your glory. Jesus even reminded them, no doubt, in Gethsemane, when Peter drew His sword and Jesus said to him: Peter, don't you remember? *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels* (Matthew 26:53)?

So why don't you, Jesus? Why are you letting them treat You like this? Everytime they looked, they still *no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only*.

And what a *blessing* that was! Not a bummer at all. Though it would take them a little

while to understand that.

For seeing Jesus in His glory, seeing the majesty, that's awesome! But it doesn't really do anything for you. In fact, like it did that day to Peter, James, and John, it only terrifies and causes questions. It terrifies because we are sinners who have no business being in the presence of a holy and sinless God. And it causes questions, like . . . If you're such an awesome and powerful God, how come you're not doing something about . . . the situation I'm in right now? My troubles? My pain? My suffering? Or the troubles in the world, which seems more and more everyday to be going to hell in a handbasket? Why don't You do something, Jesus? Show Your glory! Make things right.

But we look up and look around . . . no glory, no intervention, no transfigurations today . . .

*Except there is.* For those with ears to hear. ***This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*** Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). *Hearing* the Word of God. This God. The crucified God. For the transfiguration shows you the awesome glory and power of God, but it is the crucifixion that shows you the awesome love of God. His love **for you**. What He came to do for you.

So Moses and Elijah don't stay. They had their day. The Law and the prophets were now being fulfilled. The Old Testament talked about the coming Saviour, pointed to Him. The Law of Moses showing us our sin and our need for a Saviour - but now the one greater than the Law, greater than our sin, greater than Moses, was here. So Moses doesn't stay. And the prophets like Elijah, their words thundered as they called the people to repentance and proclaimed the one who would come to save. That one was now here. So Elijah doesn't stay.

*But Jesus does.* Not glorious, shining, awesome Jesus. Just Jesus. Plain old Jesus. ***Listen to him.*** Listen to what He tells you so that you can see rightly. That Jesus is *never* plain old Jesus. Because that one being arrested, that one being scourged, that one trading places with sinners like Barabbas, that one being crucified, that one dead in the tomb is **the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world**. And only by *listening to Him* can you see **that that scene on Mount Calvary is even greater than the scene on Mount Transfiguration**. That the glory of His bloody cross is even greater than the glory of His shining power. That that's really how He would have us see Him. A holy and sinless God not reigning in greatness and fear, but serving in humility and love.

So that's the glory He has left here for us. The glory not of His power but of His forgiveness. The glory not of His awesomeness but of His humility. The glory not that terrifies and causes questions, but that comforts us and gives us hope. The glory that we need.

But the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. You see the flash of lightning before you hear the roll of thunder. So, too, do our thoughts and desires more quickly follow our eyes, what we can see, rather than what we hear. Signs and wonders, please; glory and miracles we can see, please; evidence, please; not just words. Not mere words.

No, Jesus says. He wants greater glory than that for you. Not what the world thinks is glorious, tells us is glorious, and what our old sinful self so often believes and wants. Not a glory that comes and goes, that doesn't last. But the glory of Jesus. A glory that perhaps doesn't look glorious or feel glorious, but is. The glory of the cross, that comes from the cross.

So we need to be changed. Like Peter, James, and John, our hearts and minds need a transfiguration. And we have it, according to Saint Paul. For we heard today, ***And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*** What is interesting about that sentence is that the word translated *transformed* there, is the same word that Mark used, which was translated as *transfigured*. So we are being transfigured, too. Into the image of Christ. That His glory might shine through us. The love, the forgiveness, the serving. The Spirit is working that in you, Paul says.

To which our old sinful self objects! We want that other glory! The more impressive stuff, we think. Loving, forgiving, serving, that's killing us! Especially to people who don't appreciate it, who are just taking advantage of us. Well, yes, old chap, that's quite the point. That old, sinful, glory-seeking, self-exalting you needs to be killed, and a new man raised with Christ. For that is how you are transformed, transfigured, into His image. By dying and rising with Him. Which is what baptism does, if you listen. What you see isn't much, but what you hear is Jesus, new life, forgiveness, adoption, and sonship. That when we look to the Font, **we see Jesus only.**

And in the same way when we look to the Altar, when we look to the Pulpit, **we see Jesus only.** God in human flesh Jesus. Glorious Jesus, forgiving Jesus, Body and Blood Jesus, serving Jesus, dying Jesus. Here for us. Not for a show, but to save. To kill us and transform us. To slay that old sinful you and raise the new you. So, *I am a poor, miserable sinner* we say. And *I forgive you all your sins*, He says. **Jesus only.**

Is that a bummer? Maybe to some. Maybe even at times to us. In the midst of a pandemic. When you're unemployed. When your family is falling apart. When your kids are rebelling. When life seems to be one disappointment after another. When nothing seems to be going your way. When you're sick. When you're beaten up and beaten down by the world. When it seems like just Jesus, plain old Jesus, isn't enough . . .

Maybe that's how Elisha felt. When Elijah was leaving. *I know! Shut up!* he said. I don't want to think about it. And then Elijah was gone, and Elisha was alone. Except he wasn't.

That double-portion of Elijah's spirit he asked for? Yeah, he got it.

But you didn't, right? No, you got even more. For you is the *fullness* of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord poured out on Pentecost and still being poured out today in the Word. And while some think this Spirit is all about signs and wonders, what we can see, He is really all about Jesus. Just Jesus. To point you to Jesus. To set your eyes on the cross. To give you forgiveness. To transform you. From sinner to saint. That you always have hope. No matter what is happening in the world or in your life, that you always have hope. Because you have Jesus. Because you have His forgiveness. Because you have His life. His risen-from-the-dead life. His eternal life.

The disciples were about to experience things that would shake them to their core. Such hatred against Jesus. Peter buckling to his fear and denying his friend, his Lord. Then seeing the once-transfigured-Jesus hanging, dying, on a cross.

*Why don't you show them, Jesus? Show them who you really are! Why are you letting them treat you like this? And then they heard: Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34). And they knew. They knew! He *was!* He was showing them who He really is. And He was giving them not what they thought they wanted, but what they really needed.

And so we enter the season of Lent to hear it, too. To *listen to Him*. We'll set aside our alleluias for a while, but know we'll sing them again. We'll set aside the whites for awhile, but know we'll see them again. In a few weeks we'll veil our crosses and stop our music . . . *is that what dying is like?* Little-by-little, things taken away? If so, then we know that Easter awaits, too. At the end of Lent is resurrection, and at the end of our life, too. And then we'll see. Moses and Elijah? Maybe. But Jesus, most definitely. And *almost* just like that day on Mount Transfiguration. Almost. But there'll be one important difference, one important change: **the holes**. In His hands, in His feet, in His side. And we'll know. We'll know! **For me**.

Might that change how you live now, under the cross? That suddenly, looking around, we no longer see anyone but Jesus only. Jesus only, loving and serving us. Jesus only, as we love and serve our neighbor. Jesus only, hidden in a sin-filled, hell-bent world. But here. With us.

What a bummer? No. Just a different kind of glory . . .

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.