

That one, shining moment

They stayed when most of us would have run. They told no one because this experience came before twitter and Facebook and the rest of the internet. Three of Jesus disciples saw the impossible; Jesus, joined by Moses and Elijah and a shining cloud of glory on an otherwise empty hilltop. They saw this and knew that their lives were being changed.

This incident is reported by three of the four gospel writers, and hinted at by one of the witnesses in the epistle he writes before his death. It has no real effect on the work Jesus does; it doesn't influence his trial, or reveal any secrets about the future.

The Transfiguration is like a bookmark you find in a book you've never read – an indication that someone else knows this story to – that God, in fact, is present, active and eager to be known. And then we turn the page, and Jesus resumes that seemingly lonely walk to Jerusalem.

It does make a difference – this moment of shining glory; this encounter with the giants of the faith – it is not just Jesus who is transformed, face shining, clothes, radiant. Too often, we forget about Peter, James and John.

Peter tells us himself how he was affected. His life is radically changed – of course, the resurrection plays its part – but his mountain-top moment with Jesus was important too;

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty”

That moment had a lasting impact; a brief encounter with the glory and majesty of God was affirmed (for Peter) by everything that followed, and we are asked to understand and accept this for ourselves – without the “shiny Jesus” and his ancient companions. All we have is the story. And the story doesn't seem to be enough.

February 23, 2020

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“If only we had more people on Sunday”, goes the refrain; “if only we could tell more people the truth about Jesus; the truth about God; the truth about the work of the church...” all we want is a chance; a moment for those “other people” to see us shine. And we offer programs and alter worship and put televisions in the lobby so no one misses the hockey game (yes, that really happened) and we still can’t turn things around. But there is only so much room on the mountain top, and no one stays for long.

Peter’s words, well after the fact, are important still. This was no “program of the church” that he met on the mountain that day. He became convinced, over time, that this was God – fully present, constantly active, gracefully offering Peter and the others just what they needed, and no more. “Here I am in your midst” said God in that moment, and Peter’s life was never the same.

This may not be the church of old – we may be overwhelmed by new programs and different technologies and changing priorities – we may be desperate for a moment like the one Matthew describes and Peter, James and John experienced; a flash of brilliance that signals God’s presence and assures us God is with us – and the truth is, that moment has never been very far from us.

Every time we gather in worship; every time we gather in grief; whenever we celebrate in faith; every time we share this bread and cup – these are the moments God meets us; these are the shining bookmarks in our faith story – this is where we find ourselves transformed.

The disciples who left the mountain top that day were still in for some trouble. Jesus would be arrested – they would turn their backs on him; there was death and shame and doubt and fear to follow. But that brief reminder of God’s presence was not an idle threat – it was a glorious promise, and so it is still, for us.

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