

Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, in those days, told no one any of the things they had seen.

"In those days, they told no one..."

Weighed down with sleep, but still awake. Besides wondering why the disciples can't manage wakefulness around Jesus in prayer, I'm forced to admit that I've had moments like this – time when sleep won't come – when my mind won't be stilled – when nothing, not even prayer, seems to help.

Peter speaks up; that's Peter's thing. 'Let's capture this moment,' he says – so addled that he doesn't know what he's saying. Whatever else is going on here, the gospel is clear on this: Peter and James and John are out of their element.

So of course, they told no one. Who would believe them? They didn't even trust their own eyes.

But Jesus – Jesus is in his element. In an attitude of prayer he is transfigured. While at prayer, Jesus is most truly himself; in the presence of history and tradition (at least in the eyes of the weary trio of disciples.) God's glory shines around him – God's voice is heard in affirmation. This is who Jesus is; the One who brings heaven and earth together in harmony.

No wonder they don't tell anyone. Who would believe them? A moment of wonder and splendour; a moment where reality seems suspended – but in fact,

this is reality. God's presence – God's connecting time and space, the practical and the prophetic – that is reality as Jesus reveals it. It should have jolted them immediately awake, but the difference was too much – they remain, for the moment, captives of their own insufficient imagination.

Luke 9:37-43a

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.' Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

"The greatness of God."

A sign; that's what is needed. A public happening. A miracle. Of course, the opportunity arises – and the desperate father tells Jesus that, though he begged them, the disciples could not make this miracle. Insufficient imagination at work. Those who are attuned to the divine – Jesus, for one, and any of Jesus' supernatural opponents (the demon, in this case) – they are sufficiently aware of the reality of God to be instantly affected. The spirit that has the boy in its possession knows the truth. This nexus of sacred and secular – this embodiment of divine delight – this Jesus of Nazareth will bring order to the chaos of this boy's existence just as the primeval command separated darkness and light. The boy is made whole and the rest are astounded at the greatness of God.

For a moment, the crowd is convinced. This sign alters their imagination; molds it in the direction of God's intention. Miracles are like that.

That's why we crave them – celebrate them – venerate them. We need things that remind us that all is not lost – that God is still great. And we have to look harder these days.

Luke 9:43b-45

While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.' But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

“They were afraid to ask him...”

Jesus' words, so long a source of hope and wonder, became for his disciples a source of fear and dread. The words 'betrayed into human hands' could not sink in – it was unthinkable. In light of what they had just seen – in spite of having their imaginations momentarily liberated – Jesus' words made no sense. Fear is an agent of imagination too – in the worst possible way.

The journey to Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and resurrection is a collision of competing realities. The powerful and the prayerful; the certain and the merely curious; all of these are thrown together by the presence of Jesus, and fear dictates the response.

Fear of being wrong. Fear of being diminished. Fear of losing power. Fear leads to a failure of imagination which leads to despair.

We are not immune to this kind of response.

Fear over the state of our finances often means we cannot imagine that anyone might be generous.

Fear about the increasing anger that wells up within us means we cannot imagine what an effective display of collective peace-making might look like.

Fear about the future means we are quick to forget that God is at the heart, not only of our present circumstances, but our future endeavours too.

The disciples fear the reality of Jesus' words, and in their fear, they cannot imagine that God can do anything about it.

Thanks be to God, they were wrong.

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Fear and the failure of imagination

Their imaginations are rekindled when their teacher is raised. Their fears are vanquished by an empty tomb. The future once again looks wide open, even though their problems are far from over. Faith relies on the best of our imaginative impulses, and we need that now more than ever.

So, we will gather at Christ's table, and our imaginations will be refreshed as we meet our Lord in the ordinary elements of bread and wine.

We will gather this afternoon at our congregational meeting, and our imaginations will be restored as we share the stories of joy and accomplishment – dreaming and planning for even more, in spite of our fears.

We act in faith to banish fear – we let our imaginations stretch and soar and thus we are liberated from the ordinary things that would otherwise wear us down. And all because of Jesus – who dares to tell us the truth; who brings the Holy to earth; who dares us to dream with God.