

“Only At Baskin Robbins”

Luke 9-28-43

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This morning, our attention is drawn to an unusual event in the life of Jesus that occurred on a mountain in Galilee. It is wrapped in mystery and leaves us with more questions than answers.

It must have been important in the development of the early Christians' faith, because three of the four gospel writers included it in their narratives.

One of the questions we cannot definitively answer is where this event occurred. It could have been Mount Tabor, near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth where the Church of the Transfiguration has been built.

On the other hand, it might have been Mount Hermon, a few miles northeast of Caesarea Philippi. This is logical to many since this is the place in the previous passage where Peter made that bold confession of faith and declared Jesus to be the Son of God.

If Peter had prevailed that day, we would know the precise location. He wanted to build a permanent campground, an early version of KOA, which would have drawn pilgrims to this very day.

The location is not the important part of this story, is it? What occurred there, the message it conveys, and the function of this experience in the unfolding gospel story are, however. So, let's examine what happened that day to see what lessons we can glean from it.

Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, John and James, to a mountain to pray. The other nine were left below to continue meeting the many needs of the people.

While Jesus was praying, his appearance dramatically changed. Matthew gives us a little more detail at this point than Luke does when he writes, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."

Suddenly, Jesus was joined by two other men whom the disciples believed to be Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah, the prophet. The three of them carried on a conversation, and while

we do not know exactly what was said, we know they were discussing Jesus' "departure," a reference to his death on the cross. If Jesus headed to Jerusalem to speak truth to power and confront the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, he would meet with stiff resistance, be arrested and crucified. In other words, he would be treated no differently than many of the prophets who preceded him, including John the Baptist.

At some point in this conversation, Peter blurts out what he thinks is a brilliant idea which was sure to meet with approval. He offers, no doubt with the help of John and James, to build three tents so Jesus, Moses and Elijah can stay there indefinitely and enjoy each others' company.

I almost feel sorry for Peter because of what happened next. A cloud overshadows them and a voice, I assume from heaven, speaks. You will note the similarity to the baptismal blessing. "This is my Son, my Chosen; **listen** to him!" Even Peter got that message and quit talking. He and the other two disciples fell to the ground in fear and silence.

This is one part of the story I do understand. Every time my elementary school principal, Miss Roma, walked into our classroom and spoke, I had the same reaction.

Knowing the disciples were traumatized, Jesus went to them, touched them and reassuringly said, "Get up and do not be afraid." As they departed the mountain, again from Matthew's account, Jesus ordered them to tell no one about this event until after the resurrection.

Luke follows this story by telling his readers what happened the next day. A desperate father came seeking help for his son who was suffering from epileptic seizures. While Jesus was away, this man approached the disciples who did not accompany Jesus to the mountain for help, but they were unable to heal this boy. As frustrated as Jesus was over his disciples' lack of faith, he listened to this heartbroken father and healed his son, to the astonishment of all who were watching.

Why do you think Luke included this story in his account of Jesus' life? I am sure there were many reasons, and I wish he were here to tell us. It is not as easy to unpack as it may seem.

First of all, I think Luke was encouraging his readers to put their complete faith and confidence in Jesus. God worked in Jesus' life to fulfill the hopes and dreams of two of the most prominent leaders in the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah. Everything the prophets wanted for this world was being taught and modeled by Jesus, and Luke wanted his readers to believe him and listen to him.

I also think Luke wanted his readers to follow Jesus' example, especially when facing tough decisions and big challenges. Let me explain.

What drove Jesus to the mountain that day? He was wrestling with the decision to stay in Galilee and continue his ministry where, for the most part, he was welcomed, appreciated and loved, or travel south to Jerusalem where his message would be rejected by the religious authorities, and in all likelihood, he would be arrested and crucified. To say the least, this was an agonizing decision, one which he could not make alone. So, what did Jesus do? He went to the mountain to pray.

When facing a tough decision or big challenge, take time to pray. If Jesus needed God's help, how much more do we? Evidently, he found God to be a valued source of wisdom, understanding, guidance and courage, all the things Jesus needed to make this tough decision and carry it out.

I believe God will be as good and faithful to us when we go to the mountain to pray over tough decisions. We, too, are His children whom He loves dearly.

When facing a tough decision or big challenge, seek the counsel and prayers of others. Jesus did not go to the mountain alone, did he? He took three of his disciples, leaving the others to continue helping people while they were gone.

In addition, while on the mountain, Jesus was suddenly joined by Moses and Elijah. For some reason, I don't think this was their first encounter. I have no way of knowing this for sure, but I get the feeling they mentored Jesus throughout his entire ministry.

Each of them knew how risky and tough leadership is, and how much wisdom and courage are required to do what is right. Too much was at stake for Jesus to be anything less than his best. I am confident they wanted to help him achieve this.

Whose counsel do you seek when you have tough decisions to make? To whom do you need to turn for advice and encouragement this week? I hope you will seek their input.

Who needs you to make room for them at this time so they can seek your counsel? Perhaps you have been down the road they are traveling. Who better to help them than you? Will you make yourself available?

When facing a tough decision or big challenge, don't listen to someone who wants you to do what is easy, but what is best under the circumstances. Why do you think Luke followed the story of the transfiguration with this healing miracle? He wanted to show his readers the folly of Peter's idea to build a campsite so they could extend their stay. As nice as this would have been, it was not what Jesus needed to do at that time.

At the bottom of that mountain were villages full of people carrying heavy burdens, so overwhelming the disciples left behind were unable to help them. These people needed hope and help more than Jesus needed a retreat, or that special event needed memorializing. God knew it, and so did Jesus.

Every decision we make needs to be made in light of its impact upon those around us, especially those dependent upon us. We must see the short and long term consequences of our decisions upon them, as well as us.

Life is not just about us. As a matter of fact, I have jokingly said the only time life is about me is at Baskin Robbins. I suppose this is why I enjoy going to ice cream stores. For a few precious minutes, I am the center of my universe. When I leave that store, I need to leave my selfishness in there with the ice cream.

The easy road is so enticing and alluring. Who wouldn't want to stay on the mountain and shoot the breeze with Moses and Elijah and make S'mores around a campfire? Sounds good to me!

What would Jesus say about this, though? After all, this passage compels us to listen to him. I think he would tell us the easy road rarely, if ever, is good for anyone around us. What makes our life easy usually makes theirs harder.

This would certainly have been true for that father and his son who were waiting for Jesus to return. If Jesus had stayed on the mountain as Peter suggested, their lives would have been filled with chronic misery and agony.

What tough decision are you facing today? What big challenge lies in front of you? Who is depending upon you to make a wise, unselfish and courageous decision? To whom do you need talk to about it? Who can help you make the best decision, one that is as good for those around you as it is for you?

Start with God. You don't have to go to a mountain to have this conversation. He's there with you now.