

03/03/2019

“The Astounded Crowd”

Scripture: Luke 9:28-43

Transfiguration Sunday

Theme: God’s greatness is not just manifested on mountaintops, but through and to those who believe.

Today we come to the close of the liturgical season after the Epiphany, which you may recall signifies or expresses an appearance or manifestation of God, often accompanied by a new insight or understanding. And so, we conclude with another epiphany of sorts, this one of God’s glory revealed on a mountaintop, and then manifested through action to an astounded crowd.

Listen to how Luke describes it . . .

Luke 9:28-43

²⁸ *About eight days after Jesus said this (namely foretelling his closest disciples of his suffering, death and resurrection), he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.*

³³ *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.) ³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.*

³⁷ *The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. ³⁸ A man in the crowd called out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”*

⁴¹ *“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² Even while the boy was*

coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

So, what can we see and learn from this wonderful experience and story?

Let me just express a couple this morning.

† **Take time apart in prayer with Jesus**

First, I think it teaches us the importance of taking some time apart from the demands, expectations, and realities that we experience in our daily lives. We need to rest and to commune with God, and consider more deeply what God wants of us, plans for us, and empowers us to do.

In essence then, we should take time to pray, as Jesus did. I find it significant that the passage just before this, taking place some eight days earlier, is also about a time Jesus was praying in private, with his disciples present.

In our times of prayer, we may ask questions of God or be asked questions by God. We may ask for God's grace and forgiveness, or for healing and wholeness of ourselves or others. We may ask for basic or special needs. We should ask for God's guidance and direction, for wisdom and understanding. And we should ask for faith and courage whether or not we have all the answers or understanding we seek.

Thomas Warren of Texas shared his witness that “**God is Listening**” in The Upper Room (8/15/18):

“In my early days as a Christian, I struggled to understand the importance of prayer. I didn't see the point, and because of that my spiritual growth suffered.

“Over time, I learned that without prayer I didn't really have a relationship with God. It was absurd to think that I could call God my friend without talking and spending time with God. So I went to some friends and people in my church and asked them questions such as, “What are the right times to pray?” and “What is the right way to pray?” I learned that praying is all about the heart. No matter what we say, God is always there.

“Prayer is a journey into the great relationship we have with God. It is a privilege! Praying isn't about what we are doing; it's about what we are looking for—a relationship with God. If we seek with open hearts, God will do the rest.”

And Linda Furtado, a United Methodist student at Asbury Theological Seminary writes:

“Jesus embodies what many of us seem to forget. He shows us the importance of setting apart in prayer before coming back to see all the people informed in the fullness of God’s glory. In him, we are reminded to trust in the essential directions we have been provided to pray, listen, and care for the holistic needs of people.

“Before leaving our own mountaintop experiences with Jesus at church, in retreats, on vacations, we are faced with a sobering truth. The places, occasions, and experiences of joy are not something to hold fast to and try to make last forever within structures of our own creation. We will not always have the benefit of the focus that comes from being desensitized from the world and embraced in a cloud filled with God’s voice. Yet, we have prayer, just as Jesus had, and can rely on the inspiration and discernment of the Spirit Jesus left for us.” (*UM Discipleship Ministries, 2019*)

So take time apart in prayer with Jesus.

† **Have faith in God’s presence and power to transform your life, those you love, and those whom you encounter in life’s journey.**

This leads us to our response of our close encounter with God, and the revelation it brings.

Linda Furtado goes on to share these insights and feelings. Although you may have heard me say it before, I believe the way she puts it is worth listening to:

“God has a plan for us, just as Jesus knew of the plans for his life in death and resurrection. We are called to go back to the people, to follow Jesus back down the mountain, resting on our feet in Spirit and truth.

“Jesus recognized in the people both the need for what he had to offer and the lack of faithfulness that permeated his followers. Even though he exclaimed his frustration to this generation of believers, he then casts out the evil spirit and heals the [man’s] son. It is understandable that what he has done is by God and something his followers should be able to do. Much like Peter, the people needed to recognize the glory of God. This outreach and forming of followers and believers was his destination. Faithfulness to God and commitment to the people is foundational to what it is to be a disciple of Jesus, to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (the mission of The United Methodist Church).

“We are challenged to follow the directions of Jesus to this destination faithfully and to trust that how we are being led is enough. We are to trust that the destination of the coming of God’s kingdom for all of the people, whenever we reach that aim, is worth the anticipation and staying awake for. If we grow more concerned with following Christ, then we will be closer to living by faith and leading the people to do the same.

By faith, we will be ready whenever God’s glory shines, no matter how sudden and no matter how brightly.” (ibid.)

Now I ask, can you also imagine how the other disciples who did not have that experience with Jesus may have felt when they could not cast the demon from the boy and make him well?

Yet, as Linda Furtado adds:

“ . . . their lack of full confidence in the power of Jesus was released in great joy as the crowd was overwhelmed by God’s great and glorious power.

“Remember that just as the disciples on the mountain needed to see the glory of God revealed, so the people needed to see as well. And, just as Jesus prayerfully prepared for continued work among the people, so we disciples of Jesus must prepare ourselves, go up on our mountains in prayer, and bring the glory of the Lord to all people, in all places, by faith.” (ibid.)

I pray that I, and all of us, can continue to share and show God’s love and healing in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in every time, place, and way possible! To the glory of God Eternal! Amen!

+ + +

Questions for Reflection:

How do you take time “apart from the world” and listen to God?

Have you experienced God’s glory revealed in Jesus?

How has God used you to express that glory in those around you?