



“We Can’t Freeze Time”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

February 11, 2018

Scripture (CEB):

Mark 9:2-9

² Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone. He was transformed in front of them, ³ and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white. ⁴ Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One^[a] had risen from the dead.

Sermon:

People often like Peter. He isn’t smooth. He isn’t particularly clever. And he says the darndest things, whatever he thinks he blurts it right out.

In a previous chapter he has been rebuked by Jesus for denying that Jesus might suffer.

Now, he is dumbfounded in the presence of the greatest of the greats, standing there with his Teacher and friend, and all he can think to say is, “let’s build temples, or tents or something like that.”

But the text also admits that the followers of Jesus were terrified. Again.

Jesus seems so great at healing and exorcising, and teaching and letting his friends know what he is thinking and planning. He seems like an approachable kind of guy, most of the time at least.

But then, there is a moment like this and every “normal” thing about Jesus goes out the window.

He glows.

He stands with the eternal heroes that are believed to live with God in heaven, deathless and eternal. Moses and Elijah. Jewish tradition held that the burial place of Moses was unknown, and we heard in our first reading, that Elijah was carried away in a whirlwind. They did not die. They transcended death. They dwelt immortal and eternal in the presence of God.

It is one of the tenets of Christian faith that Jesus, too, dwells in the eternal presence of God, “at the right hand of the Father” as it is said in the Nicene Creed.

And Jesus stands glowing, as messengers of heaven, glow.

So, yes, the disciples are foolish and afraid.

Or, perhaps, in time out of time, they are so caught up in something so beyond our typical day to day living, that they are speechless.

Well, except for Peter.

But this time, there is no scolding from Jesus.

Instead, this mystical moment, this time out of time, continues to stun them with the divine voice and the calling of the Son.

They are so blessed to be in this moment. They are participant observers in the most dramatic moment of Jesus’ revelation as “Son of God”, “beloved” of God. At his baptism in

the Jordan River, Jesus had a much more private moment of divine revelation and commissioning. But up here on the mountain, the disciples hear and see also.

In this moment they realize Jesus is anything but an ordinary guy. He is so much more than their Rabbi, than the Teacher they know and love.

Surely, such mystical moments seem to stop time. To be in the midst of communion, surrounded and suffused with holy mystery...time doesn't matter, we don't feel bound by time.

But it doesn't last, this communion.

The "mountaintop experience" ends, for Jesus and the disciples, and for us.

And coming down the mountain, we are faced with confusion, just like the disciples. And we face suffering, again. Time will not stop for them, or for us.

Inevitable, and dreadful, suffering will come. Jesus will suffer. Jesus will die. Without equivocation, Jesus will die before he will rise from the dead.

This is the scandal of the cross...that the "beloved one" of God will not be spared, and that his enemies will have him killed.

It is this horrible reality that many of us want to deny. And over the years, various brands of Christianity have said, "Jesus didn't really suffer, it was all pretend. As God's son, there was no suffering." Or, "Jesus didn't really die, he fell into a coma and was revived after."

This doesn't help our faith, or our confusion.

Acknowledging the vulnerability of God, the costly love of God towards often wretched and frequently wicked humankind; to find that God would rather suffer than inflict suffering; to learn of the price love will pay; through the suffering and death of Jesus...this is a radical step. But it is a step into the acceptance of pain and grief and loss. Even for the Son of God. Even for God, who so loves the beloved son.

It changes how we understand God, and Jesus, if we believe that love is greater than fear, than suffering, than death. There were no armies, no ocean of rain to obliterate the evil, no

plagues or deaths of first-born children to protect Jesus, to spare him, to warn his enemies. He did not raise up an army of violent overthrowing, as the beloved of God. He came down from the mountain of glory and faced violence, suffering, and death as God's son. Without becoming violent, without becoming cruel or hard or punishing.

Jesus is God's beloved child, not just shining in glory on a mountaintop, but also in the abject and cruel death he suffered.

God was with Jesus in glory and in humiliation. In the time of exhilaration, and in the time of darkness.

When Jesus cries from the cross of his abandonment by God, he is quoting the 22nd psalm. He is in prayer with the One he had known to be with him at all times and at all places. God with him, in his suffering, in his dying.

But we also learn the suffering of Jesus was not the last word spoken to death and hate. We discern that the suffering of a tortured world is not the last word of God to be spoken towards all our suffering.

We believe that Easter and the risen Lord are the promise given to all humanity, God's word of victory, of joy, of bliss!

Standing on the mountaintop, glowing and transcending time, standing on the mountaintop, with the heroes of the ages, standing on the mountaintop, suffused with the love of God for the "beloved one" we see that Jesus is prefiguring the mighty moment when death is overthrown in the resurrected life.

As he was on the mountain, he will be again on Easter morn.
Nothing in time or space will stop it.

And so on Easter you will hear, "Christ is Risen!"
And the people will respond, "He is risen, indeed."

Say it now, for you will not be able to say it for forty days more.
Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen indeed.
Alleluia! Amen.