



**Say What?
Luke 9:28-36
March 3, 2019
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In August 2017, there was a total solar eclipse across the United States. Did anyone see it live?

I watched on TV and the Internet. I remember watching the reactions of people as the eclipse reached totality. Two reactions remain with me.

One was of a reporter for CNN. She was reporting to Anderson Cooper. And as the eclipse reached totality, the reporter went absolutely bonkers. "This is the most incredible thing I've ever seen. This is crazy. This is just the coolest thing. I am so sorry Anderson, I am usually not a very emotional person, I really am in control of my emotions, but this is so amazing and I can't help it." She went on and on, just giddy with amazement.

Another reaction was of a meteorologist who was reporting live for his station. Right in the middle of his report, as the eclipse is total, he started crying. He apologized to his audience and sobbed, "I've been waiting my whole life to witness this."

I saw videos of other grown men sobbing, and people trying to express what they saw and how they felt...and words seemed so inadequate. But you could see it in their faces that they had been touched and moved. One person said, "I'll never forget this the rest of my life."

I think this is what is happening in our scripture passage as the disciples witness the glory of Jesus, or in more theological terms, the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus changes physically before them – his face changes, his clothes become dazzling white.

And when Moses and Elijah show up, Peter starts babbling away....This is the coolest thing I have ever seen! Jesus, let's stay here forever and ever. I can build

some shelters for all of us and we never have to come down from this mountain!” Peter was going absolutely bonkers just like that CNN reporter. Tongue in cheek, the scripture passage makes a comment: Peter did not know what he was saying. The Message translation says he blurted this out without thinking and kept babbling on and on. It was like they were witnessing a total solar eclipse, but instead they were seeing Jesus in all his glory. And they had come undone.

There are all kinds of questions with this story:

Why did Jesus want Peter, James and John to see this?

Did Jesus even know this was going to happen?

Why did Elijah and Moses show up?

For that matter, how did they know it was Elijah and Moses?

Why did the disciples almost sleep through this? I mean, Jesus was as bright as a flash of lightening!

And how can the disciples walk away from this event and tell no one!? They saw the glory of Jesus, and they “kept this to themselves.”

If you saw the glory of Jesus, would you keep it to yourself?

Why did this happen to Jesus and the disciples? I believe this happened to Jesus because he needed encouragement. Note that the passage says when Moses and Elijah show up, they start a conversation with Jesus. That conversation is about what Jesus will face in the near future....that is, the cross.

Think about this. Half the time the disciples don't understand Jesus. They don't know what he is talking about, especially when he starts talking about his death in Jerusalem. In fact, they try to get him to not talk about it or object to what he is saying.

Jesus must surely have heard the tempter's voice whispering into his ear, “See, even your friends don't buy it! Go another way! Why don't you try to establish an earthly kingdom? That's what everyone wants you to do. They will follow you for that.”

We say that Jesus was fully divine, yet fully human. But that day, the human side of Jesus needed encouragement because no human or earthly voice was available to encourage Jesus, because they didn't "get" him. So his heavenly Father provides new voices in the conversation. Moses and Elijah are there to encourage Jesus. They come to point Jesus in the direction he needs to go. They point him to the path that leads to the salvation of the world.

And, I believe the disciples needed encouragement, too. At the moment, it probably didn't seem encouraging. In fact, the passage uses the word "afraid." They really had no idea what was going on at the moment. And Peter became undone. Understandably so.

But perhaps later, after Jesus' death and resurrection, it was a way to remember and to keep going in their faith as they brought the glory of Christ to others. For one moment, Peter saw the humanity of Jesus fused with the eternal glory of God. He glimpsed the mystery of our faith: that God became human because of God's great love for us.

As a result, the transfiguration encourages us, especially this particular Body of Christ. We have sustained many losses in the last few years. Yet, this story is here to remind us that in the midst of the loss, the glory of God is still among us. God is still here in this church. And we need to have eyes to see it.

I had a busy week, and didn't start writing this message until yesterday morning, which is really late for me. Before I started, I sat down with the passage and lived in it for a while. I thought about encouragement. And tears came to my eyes, because I wanted to see the glory. I needed encouragement.

I then read the reading for yesterday in the devotional book *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young (the devotions are written from God's voice, so this is God speaking): "...I bless you with Joy unspeakable and *full of Glory*. The Joy is Mine, and the Glory is Mine; but I bestow them on you as you live in My Presence, inviting Me to live fully in you."

I thought about the cloud that came and covered the disciples and Jesus and Elijah and Moses. The cloud appears a lot in the Bible, and it always represented the Presence of God. The cloud led the Israelites through the wilderness. Moses received The Ten Commandments in a cloud.

When God instructed the Israelites to construct a portable Tabernacle, God filled the tent with his Presence in the form of a cloud. And, later, when Solomon built the Temple, once again a cloud filled the sanctuary.

The cloud appears in our passage today.

Think of what happens when you find yourself in fog. Everything is obscured. It's disorientating. It's colorless. Things are distorted.

I remember when I first moved here, several friends came to visit, and we went to the Desert Museum. It was a rainy day and quite cool. After the visit, we decided to head into Tucson for dinner, and drive over Gate's Pass from the Desert Museum. As we drove up the mountainside, we encountered fog.

I had never been on that road before, and the drive was very disorientating, a bit frightening driving up and on and into the unknown, and not being able to see very far. All of the sudden, the road seemed to end and appearing out of the clouds right in front of us was a mountain. I slammed on the breaks because it was so disorienting.

And majestic. It took our breath away, and we were filled with awe at this beautiful sight.

We as a church are heading into the unknown as we begin the process of looking for a new music director, as we continue the process of looking for a new pastor. We sit in a cloud where we cannot see in front of us, but there, in the midst of the cloud is the Presence of God who has come to be with us.

We need to learn how to sit in the cloud. God spoke in that cloud. But note what God said as Peter and James and John and Jesus and Moses and Elijah sat in the cloud. God didn't say: see the glory of Jesus. God said, Listen to him. We need to be patient, and learn how to be comfortable not knowing about some things, but rather just know Someone.

It is in the cloud we are changed. It is in the cloud we meet the living Christ, and we encounter His glory.

When the disciples descended down from that mountain, they came down with more questions than answers. As a church, we are experiencing a time where we have more questions than answers. So may we in this time sit in the cloud, be in the Presence of God, encounter the glory of Christ. To not have all the answers, rather listen and be encouraged. Be in awe and allow God to change us. That is my prayer for you.

Charge

Carry the glory of Christ in your hearts and on your faces. Do not keep it to yourself, so others will know of God's presence with them.

Benediction

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.