

2 Kings 2:1-11

1 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. **2** Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. **3** The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." **4** Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. **5** The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." **6** Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. **7** Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. **8** Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. **9** When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." **10** He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." **11** As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. **12** Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Mark 9:2-9

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, **3** and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. **4** And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. **5** Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." **6** He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. **7** Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" **8** Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. **9** As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

One of my favorite movies is National Lampoon's Vacation, featuring Chevy Chase's comedy brilliance as he portrays Clark Griswold, a man who dreams of taking his family on the perfect summer vacation. In one of the first scenes Clark and his wife are seen doing the dinner dishes as he shares with her the plans for this once in a lifetime trip to Wally World. He is explaining to her why they should drive instead of fly. The scene itself is meant to focus on their conversation, but it is what is happening in the background that really shines the light of who Clark Griswold is without a word being spoken.

Clark's wife, Ellen, is scraping food off the dinner plates and handing them to Clark to wash, but instead of washing them, he just takes a dry towel and wipes the dirty plates and sticks them back in the cabinet. If you aren't paying attention, you miss this funny bit, but if you do notice it gives the audience an important clue of how obsessed Clark Griswold is about this vacation. He is so caught up in the dream he is not paying attention to the task at hand. Some dreamers never do, they get lost in the idea and find difficulty executing it. Some dreamers, however, become very task oriented and focused on the work of achieving the dream.

Sometimes, when it comes to being a disciple, focus is everything...not just focus on what we dream or hope or believe but focus on what we are doing in the midst of those dreams, hope, and beliefs. It is easy to understand how Peter got a little distracted on the mountaintop. I mean...who wouldn't be amazed and star-struck to look and see their friend Jesus standing between Elijah and Moses – two of the greatest God followers in the Bible. Elijah who represents the Nevi-im, the prophets, and Moses who represents the Torah, the law. Jesus who has come to fulfill them both. It is a star-studded moment made more brilliant when Jesus begins to shine and reflect a light that is dazzling to behold. Jesus, who Peter already believes is the beautiful and amazing Messiah, is made more beautiful and amazing as he stands with God's servants and proves to all who watch that Jesus is an ongoing part of God's plan...a continuation of God's story of love, mercy, and everlasting life for the world. And it is here that Peter loses focus. He is so caught up in the dream or vision of Jesus as Messiah, that he loses focus on the task at hand...the meaning of the moment. Instead, he does what many of us are tempted to do when we see a dream unfolding...we want to hold on to it.

I'm guilty as well but my kids have made me more mindful of how much of life we now view through a camera lens. If you see something amazing happen just look around at how many people have their phones out and are watching the event through their phone camera instead of really watching and soaking it in. My kids remind me all the time to be present in the moment means to have nothing between us. I love having pictures to document our good times, but often I look at the pictures later and see things that I missed, that I might have noticed had I paid more attention. Peter didn't have a smart phone or a camera, but he still had the temptation to hold the moment for himself. "Let's build shelters! Three of them...each of them get a shelter...let's make them comfortable, show hospitality, keep them here on the mountain a while! Let's build walls around them and hold in this dazzling glory so that we can keep beholding it...giving no thought to why the glory needed to shine in the first place.

It reminds me of a conversation I had recently with some people from another congregation. We had been challenged to take a look at the community around our churches and identify places that were showing strength or thriving and places that were not, places where people were underserved. One person said to me, "I don't

understand why we were asked to look out to the community for places we could strengthen, we need someone to come into our church and help strengthen us.” I kept thinking, this is a “let’s build shelters” kind of thinking. This person has fallen into the trap that so many, even Peter, falls into...misunderstanding that Jesus’ purpose isn’t meant to be confined within walls...his light isn’t meant to be hidden under roofs and behind closed doors. The glory of God shines and dazzles because it is meant to be seen and shared, it is meant to be reflected and regenerated. So often, the Church that proclaims they know something about God’s dream of hope and resurrection for the world, forgets the purpose of that dream....the work of that dream...we forget the task at hand of that dream...and we might as well be trying to cleanse hearts with dirty rags...because we have missed the point.

Mark seems to feel bad for Peter, he makes the excuse that Peter is too terrified to know what to say. Maybe we all are when we realize that God’s presence isn’t always peaceful and comforting but sometimes it is about shining light in places we aren’t sure we want it to shine. Maybe we all get a little scared when the truth we say we believe is suddenly lit up like a neon sign in front of us and we realize that God’s presence isn’t as calm and restorative as much as it is radical and energizing.

Perhaps, we should be a little afraid when we realize that listening and obeying God’s beloved son means we are parting waters and walking where others don’t dare to walk. Maybe, just maybe, Peter helps us all to see that building walls isn’t what Jesus called us to do, and the Transfiguration, as well as Elijah’s story of passing the mantle to Elisha, shows us that God is calling all of us who are becoming a people of God to spend more time crossing over than settling down.

Being transformed into the image of Christ means crossing over from a life that is self-centered to a life that is outward focused, mission oriented. Crossing over also means that we encounter God in ways that open the door for a greater understanding of who God is and who we are as a people of God. When we assume we know God and how God should behave, we limit our ability to be surprised or moved by anything unexpected that God might do.

What would it mean for you to cross over from what is, to what could be? What would it look like for you to cross over from where we stand, to step into the mystery of where God is leading us to stand? What would it be like to cross over from our own understanding, to embrace the dazzling glory of a Jesus who drives us off the mountain we yearn to settle on and sends us back out among the people who are wondering the darkness and need a great light to find their way?

Yes, the Transfiguration story is a big churchy story that on the surface may seem it has little to do with us, but look deeper, look past the dream, look past the reality of God’s work in this story, and see that there is a task at hand for each of us...the

witnesses to the glory...to go back down the mountain and cross over from spectator to servant...from passerby to prophet...from observer to obedient disciple sent to show God's glory and introduce God's son to the world.

There's a journey ahead, a crossing to make and the season of Lent is going to help take us there.