

Christ Himself is Christianity:
“The Exalted Christ”
Mark 9: 2-10

February 26, 2006
Dr. J. Howard Olds

Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story about a ship that was in serious trouble in a storm. A passenger on that ship, defying orders, made his way to the pilot, who seeing the fear on the passenger's face gave him a smile of assurance. Relieved, the traveler returned to his cabin and said, “I have seen the face of the pilot. He smiled and all is well.”

There are times in life when we need to see our pilot face-to-face. That's what happened in this mystical story that the Church calls the Transfiguration of Christ. Peter, James and John were there. Moses and Elijah showed up from the past. They have an experience that is mystical and out of this world. I want to call to your attention Verse 8 that says, “*Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.*”

“Turn you eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face.”

What would a glimpse of Christ himself mean to you today?

THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFT.

There is mystery in this story. It's an epiphany, a metamorphosis, an experience of the glory of God, so much that the face of Jesus becomes radiant and his clothes are whiter than bleach could make them.

People pay big money for radiant faces these days. Face lifts are a thriving business. The only problem is that the soul has a way of seeping through. Maxwell Maltz is a plastic surgeon. He's in the business of lifting people's faces, but, Dr. Maltz says, “Even though I get marvelous results, patients are often not happy. I have come to realize that inner scars are much more difficult to remove than outer ones.”

Could your soul use a lift today? Has depression, difficulty, duties and daily routines caused your soul to sag, your spirit to falter, your heart to sink? Christ came to lift us.

Contemporary Christian artist, Tim Hughes, wrote a beautiful praise and worship song which goes:

“Light of the world you stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes; let me see.
Beauty that made the heart adore you,
Hope of life spent with you.

So, here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,

Here I am to say that you're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me."

Have you seen Jesus like that? Could your soul use a lift today?

Maybe the lift you need is affirmation. In Verse 7 we read, "*Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!'*" We have heard this phrase from heaven before; it is there at the baptism of Jesus you remember, but we have a tendency to forget. Now, when Jesus is preparing to travel the road to Jerusalem to the cross, the heavens open one more time and the voice comes to remind His only Son, "*You are my beloved child, you belong to Me.*"

One of life's biggest challenges is to remember that we are the beloved children of God. There are so many voices trying to tell us something different.

I walked into Baptist Hospital this week to make a visit and a gentleman standing at the information desk said, "You're a preacher, aren't you?" "Well, yes," I replied. "How could you tell?" "Well, you walk like a preacher, talk like a preacher, look like a preacher; I just knew." Under my breath I prayed, "Lord, help me." Have so many years of doing this made me look like what I do for a living?

We can easily become what we do, what others think, a lifetime accumulation of successes and failures. That's why we need to hear another voice, the voice of God reminding us that we are his beloved children. We don't need to waste a lot of time trying to prove what already is. We just need to lean on His everlasting arms and abide in His unending love. We need to realize that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. Remember who you are. Could your soul use a lift today?

THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFE.

Peter wanted to make a monument of this mystery. He wanted to build three shrines on the site so visitors for centuries would take note of what happened there, but Jesus will have none of it. In Verse 5, Peter says 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*" and then in Verse 6 the Scriptures say, ("*He did not know what to say for they were terrified.*") Fearful that he could say nothing, Peter just proposes an idea—a building project on the mountain. Oh, Jesus, this has been such a wonderful time in our lives we ought to put a museum up here and pilgrims for centuries would come. I can see them now, by the tour bus loads, they will gather here. We could charge admission and make little replicas of the temples we are building and they would buy them and take them back home as pilgrims do from place to place. Let's just stay up here. It is wonderful. Then Verse 9 says, "*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders to keep quiet and go to work.*" Life is not lived on the mountain top. It's hammered out in the valleys among the people where they hurt and struggle and try to make up their minds what they are going to do. As He led them down the

mountain He reminded them not to make a shrine out of this—just keep it to yourselves.

Discipleship is a daily decision to follow. Back in Chapter 8:34— John Peterson translates it, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Follow me and I will show you how. Self help is no help at all.” (Message Bible)

Stores are stocked with books on leadership. There is even a book entitled, Leadership for Dummies. If I attended one-tenth of the leadership seminars that come across my desk I would never be present to lead this congregation. We are a church and society obsessed with leadership.

Jesus had a different idea. He was interested in follower-ship. Before you lead, you must learn to follow. Able leaders emerge from the ranks of able followers. No wonder aggressive, self-starting, self-sufficient citizens of Brentwood have difficulty becoming Christian disciples.

I believe it takes at least three things to be a follower.

TRUST

Jesus said to his disciples in John 14, “*Trust in God. Trust also in me.*”

Trust is the glue that holds people together. When you trust a person, you have nothing to fear. You can relax, be safe, enjoy each other’s company.

That’s why it’s troubling when people lose their trust in God. Where can they go?

TRUTH

Jesus asked his disciples, what’s the word on the street? ‘Who do people say I am?’ ‘They say John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet.’ Then He personalizes the question. ‘What about you?’ ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter has his finest hour. “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

Followers are not sheep too dumb to have an opinion. Followers are not “yes people” who tell the leader only what he or she wants to hear. Followers speak the truth in love.

TEACHABLE SPIRIT

John 16:13 says, “*The Holy Spirit will teach you all things.*”

There are some things we did not learn in kindergarten. People who know it all may not be as smart as they think they are. Did you ever try to teach somebody something who already knows it all? Tough assignment.

The value of an open mind is its receptivity to different thoughts, further logic, finer discernment.

Disciples know how to follow. Get a life—follow Jesus. What happens is down there where the interactions of people are going on and opinions are being formed and decided. If anyone wants to follow me, get out of the driver’s seat and let me lead, says Jesus.

Disciples have a heart to help. “*Jesus is greeted by a crowd in the valley*” (Verse

14). *In that crowd is a man with an epileptic son. When the seizures strike, the kid foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, becomes stiff as a board. The disciples tried to help the boy, but they were powerless. So the father says to Jesus, "If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart to help us" (Verse 22). Jesus does. It seems to me that's what disciples do. They have a heart and help.*

Roy Hattersley is a columnist for a London newspaper. He is also an outspoken atheist. But covering the Katrina devastation on our Gulf Coast, the reporter made this observation. "There was a notable absence of rationalists' societies, free-thinker clubs, and atheists' associations, among volunteer relief workers. There was a notable presence of the Salvation Army and other faith-based groups digging through the rubbish trying to help." Then Roy Hattersley said this, "Christians are the most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others, while others sit around and scoff at religious intellectual absurdity."

Maybe we Christians haven't done enough to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters who have lost everything, but at least we have done something. I sat with a person Friday night who lives in New Orleans. The devastation is still more than my mind can comprehend, but nevertheless, Christians have been there trying to do what they can, including people from this congregation. That's what discipleship does. It gives you a heart to help. If you can do anything, Jesus, why don't you do it? Have a heart to help us.

Hattersley's reference to the Salvation Army caused me to recall the story of William Booth. He was a Methodist preacher, too, you know. "Willful Will" they called him, but Booth became disillusioned with the political wrangling of the Methodists. So he left the church and started a Christian mission in the poverty stricken East Side of London that reached out to the worst. That Christian mission became the Salvation Army, which declared war on poverty and homelessness. Or, as William Booth said:

"While women weep, as they do now. I'll fight.
While children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight.
While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,
I'll fight, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end."

That was one hundred years ago. It seems like the kind of war all of us could get behind, the war on poverty, the war on homelessness. Maybe it's time for another William Booth. If you have a heart, help us. Discipleship is a matter of your heart.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face.
He'll give you a lift.
He'll give you a life."

Amen.

