

It's a weird way to start a story, 6 days later. Unless of course you want the reader to connect what you are about to say with what had happened previously in the narrative. So if we re-wind about 10 verses, we find Peter's confession of Christ as Messiah. Peter might be a buffoon in a lot of the gospel narratives but when he gets something right he really nails it you have to admit. So finally the question that has been looming throughout Mark's Gospel "Who is this Jesus" is answered. Peter wins the grand prize. But rather than confetti and streamers and balloons falling from the ceiling, Peter's confession of Christ is immediately followed up by the first of 3 passion predictions. Jesus doesn't offer Peter congratulations. He offers him disappointment. You're right, he says, I'm God made flesh, the messiah the son of Man, but I must undergo great suffering, be rejected by the powers that be and religious authorities, be killed and in 3 days rise again". So the victory party comes to a screeching and deafening halt. You could hear crickets chirp at this point, know what I mean? You gotta love Peter because again, when he gets something wrong he gets it really wrong, he really nails it. Because it's at this point that Peter takes Jesus aside and ... rebukes him. This isn't what we signed up for. A rejected God who dies. So Jesus' response was to up the ante. Did I mention? He tells them, It's your death too. If you're really down with me you'll deny yourself take up

your cross and follow me. You want life? You must lose it for my sake and the sake of the gospel. As my disciples you too must go to the cross. Do not pass go. Do not collect. So, its 6 days after THIS that he leads Peter and James and John up that mountain. It is their disappointment of a messiah who insists that he is going to suffer and be rejected by the authorities and die.... it is THIS disappointment that they carry up this mountain. Climbing each step thinking “He must have meant something other than what he said. He is pretty cryptic” I can’t help but suspect that when they then saw Jesus transfigured into a vision of blinding white...that a new hope began inside of them. Here, the man who had just a moment ago been as filthy as them, as travel-worn and dust-covered. This man was blinding them in a vision of pure magnificence and glory and was accompanied by no other than the two biggest rock stars of all time. Moses and Elijah. Now THIS is more like it. This is the kind of Messiah I’m talking about. No wonder Peter wanted to try and take some sort of action to make the moment last, saying something profoundly stupid: “Well, It’s a good thing I’m here. Uh, should I run to Home Depot and build some stuff for you three to live in up here?” If it were me I’d probably whip out my iphone and say “could I get a picture?” Then I’d twitter something about it like an idiot. This nonsense ends abruptly when the voice of God comes form the heavens. *This is my son.*

The beloved. Listen to him. He meant what he said. It's then from all that power of the most high, all that historical and spiritual cache that Jesus turns. He turns from the glory of the mountain top. He turns from the glory of the Moses and Elijah's company. He turns from the glory of his own magnificence. And to what does he turn? ... to face to Jerusalem and what waits for him there. And he says to us follow me not to the mountain, but to the cross. Not because it's not something I have to go do he says, but because it's something you have to go see.

Here at the Transfiguration of our Lord, the hinge between Christmas and Easter we turn from the light of Christmas and Epiphany to the Lenten journey toward the cross not because its something we have to do but because it's something we have to see. There's just no way to understand the real glory of Christ without the cross. Everyone in Mark's gospel was told to keep quite and not to tell about the wonders of this Jesus because there was simply no way to understand what this whole thing meant until the cross; until we see the God who would rather die than be in the sin accounting business any longer. There is no way for us to understand what this whole thing means until we see a God who won't even lift a finger to condemn those who crucify God's son. That's why Jesus kept telling everyone who figured out who he was to be silent and not tell everyone. I

think he knew that if Peter James and John blabbed about the transfiguration everyone would think “Finally! Here’s our powerful messiah who is going to bring us glory and victory. Now *we* finally get to be the Romans.” The irony of course is that just a couple centuries into the Christian faith we did become Rome. Well, actually the church became a combination between Rome and the scribes and chief priests. In other words, as we aligned with empire rather than opposing it we began to resemble the very forces that rejected Christ. So when I hear people bemoan the fact that the church in America has lost it’s cultural currency. When I hear that the church has seen it’s glory days and is on the decline I can’t help but think maybe that’s good news. Maybe as the victory party of the church dies down we again can hear the one who turns his face to Jerusalem saying “If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it.” The bottom line is this: Jesus bids us come and die to self. That will never fill the pews like the so-called prosperity gospel and it’s idolatrous offers of cash and prizes. Jesus says turn from that which brings you glory and follow the way of the cross. That will never fill the pews like a big stage show, jazz hands and strobe lights. Jesus says follow me down the mountain of glory and up the mount

of calvary. That will never fill the pews like smily preachers proclaiming the power of positive thinking. That will never fill the pews like telling people all the rules they must keep in order to “be right with God and live in righteousness and victory” But, I would contend, this way of the cross is where Jesus is to be found. He says to his disciples then and now follow me, but he walks with them the whole way. He doesn’t abandon us to fend for ourselves on this way of the cross that we are called to walk, but accompanies us. While we seek our own glory Jesus is seeking us in the places where he’s always been; human frailty, brokenness, dust-laden walks down the mountain. He’s wooing us in simple table fellowship, and contact with the unclean, and confronting the powers that be. The shape of Christ’s church is decidedly cruciform.

The story of the Transfiguration, of a few guys witnessing Jesus’ glory and magnificence is mostly significant in that it shows us what Jesus turned from to show us the way the truth and the life. They sang of this choice of

Christ’s is the first century church – it’s found in a hymn in Phillipians 2:5-8

Let the same mind be in you that was* in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Yes, let the same mind be in us. May it be so. Amen.