

But Only Jesus

The transfiguration of Jesus before Peter, James and John, was at its core, a time of prayer. Jesus took three of his disciples to an isolated, quiet place, a mountain peak, where he could spend some quiet time with God, his Father, in prayer. What started out as a quiet outing soon became something more.

First, right before their very eyes, Jesus was transfigured, which means his appearance changed. Mark doesn't get specific. Was Jesus taller? Did his face shine like the sun? Would his mother recognize him? All Mark says is that his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than any human person could bleach them.

The second thing that happened was that Moses and Elijah were all of a sudden on the mountain with them. How did they know? Did Peter, James and John know what Moses and Elijah looked like, and so they recognized them right away? Or were their lengthy introductions, like, "Moses, this is my friend, Peter"? Of course, I am being a little silly. The presence of Moses and Elijah are significant. They represent much of the Israel's past. Moses represents the word of God spoken in the Law, and the Ten Commandments, and Elijah represents the word of God spoken to God's people, through a long line of prophets.

What were they talking about? Mark doesn't give us a clue, but we are told in the Gospel of Luke that they are discussing Jesus' future. They are discussing his upcoming struggle in Jerusalem, where Jesus will suffer, be crucified, die and rise again, to save God's world and God's people from sin, evil and death.

The third thing that happened was that Peter, happy to be there, yet afraid, and unsure what was going on, offered to build Moses, Elijah and Jesus shelters. Maybe Peter thought the three of them would be staying there. Or maybe he wished to memorialize the moment by building shrines people could visit in the future.

We don't really know what Peter thought. Neither Jesus, Moses, nor Elijah, make any comments about Peter's offer. In the end, Peter's fifteen seconds of glory is quite interrupted by Almighty God. The Gospel of Mark says a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud.

So, the fourth thing that happened is that God joins the mountain top party. God comes and clarifies why they are on the mountain. You see, what started out as a time of prayer, concluded as a defining moment for Jesus, the disciples, and us. God says that Jesus is the Son of God, and that we should listen to him.

This is so important. You see, God is there, his authoritative voice coming from a cloud. Moses is there, representing the word of God in the Law. Elijah is there, representing the word of God in the prophets. Yet, the voice of God tells the disciples and us too, that above all, to listen to Jesus. We are to listen to Jesus. It's not that we shouldn't read and learn from the Old Testament, that we shouldn't strive to follow the Ten Commandments, or that we shouldn't receive direction from the writings of the prophets. It's just that the word of God that we see and hear from Jesus is most important, it supersedes everything else.

Then, the fifth and final thing that happened is that God, Moses and Elijah all disappear. They are completely gone. The Gospel of Mark puts it this way, "Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus." There at the end of this transfiguration story, they were left only with Jesus.

That's it! The mountaintop experience is over. Down the mountain they go, the three disciples with the non-transfigured Jesus. Moses is gone. Elijah is gone. Almighty God in the cloud and his voice is gone. They are soon to re-enter every day, ordinary life with only Jesus. They are finally and ultimately, just like you and me.

What do I mean by this? Well, we too are living life without visions of Moses and Elijah, and without Almighty God overshadowing us and speaking to us from a cloud. We too live every day, ordinary lives, mostly without such mountaintop experiences, moving from day to day, joy to joy, struggle to struggle, with only Jesus.

This, however, should make us smile, because we know from our personal faith experience, that having Jesus, only Jesus, alongside us, is all we need for this life. Right? As we face the challenges of life, as we face our truly hardest struggles, as we face things such as sin, evil and death, we don't need much else. Of course, we are creatures, so having a warm place to sleep when it's 25° below zero is important. Having warm clothes to wear and something to eat and drink is important. Having family and friends to love and support us is important. Yet, even if all these things disappear, and we have only Jesus, we are okay. I mean, Jesus is our Lord and Savior. He, the Son of God, left the comforts of heaven, to save us. While here on this earth, Jesus showed us the heart of God. He showed us it is God's parental instinct to love us, forgive us, help us, heal us, take care of us, and really, to save us in every possible way.

Then, as if that were not enough, he suffered and died for us on the cross, and on the third day was raised by Almighty God from the dead, defeating our ancient foes – sin, evil and death. Now, having defeated these, the risen Jesus re-enters our world and our lives, saying, "Peace be with you. You are mine. I love you". So, when we say we are left with only Jesus, we see it not as a loss, but an advantage. You see, if all else is stripped away from us, everything we love and everything we need, and we still have Jesus, then we are safe and we are saved. He, the Son of God, will take care of us, and will never (ever) leave us.

So, we face the coronavirus, Covid19, cancer and other illnesses with faith. And we face depression, mental illness, and other great personal struggles with faith. And we face addictions to chemicals, sex and gambling with faith. And we face grief, the death of loved ones, and even our own mortality with faith.

You see, we have Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is with us, will never leave us, and will always take care of us. He is our helper and healer in ever circumstance. He looks at us with mercy and forgives our sins every day. He loves us so much that even when we die, he awakens us and brings us with him to heaven.

So, as you pray in the future, remember this is more than quiet time spent with the Lord. It is the time where Jesus also becomes transfigured before you. When you pray, he, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, will be fully present to you, alongside you, to hear your prayers and to help you through your life.

Talk to him every day. Listen to him every day. I bet you won't see Moses and Elijah in your prayers. Perhaps Almighty God won't speak to you from a cloud in your prayers. But you will have the Lord Jesus, your Savior, right there beside you. Indeed, being left only with Jesus is never a problem – it's a saving gift. Amen.