

“Whiter than White”
Luke 9:28-36
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I love this story. I love this story because we are into it now. This isn't a story where Jesus says this, and tells us that we ought to do this, and we now know that we should be doing this instead of that. Jesus doesn't tell us anything in this story. Jesus doesn't speak. But instead, he takes a couple of his disciples up onto the mountain with him. And there they see that Jesus is not alone. They see that as his face changes and his clothes become this dazzling white, that Moses and Elijah appear with him. And they're talking to each other. What they're saying, I have no idea. But then Peter sees that as they're about to leave, he says, “wait, wait, wait, we should build something to hang onto this moment.” The cloud comes over; we hear the voice of God. Similar to the day that Jesus was baptized. The voice of God that day came down and said “this is my chosen, my beloved” and this day, the cloud covers them and again we hear the voice of God, “this is my chosen, listen to him.”

And then the disciples are so scared they don't say anything. Why Moses? Why Elijah? Why not King David? Why not Obadiah? He could use a little more time. Why Moses? What you see from the Old Testament lesson, God gave the law to his people through Moses. Moses represents that law. Elijah is considered to be the first, perhaps the greatest prophet. So Jesus appears with them, so that his disciples would know that everything, everything that has happened has pointed at Christ. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, “I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.” Moses appears on that mountain to symbolize that very statement; the fulfillment of that law. Elijah is there, so that the disciples will know, and that we will know that all the prophecy we read in the Old Testament points to the coming Messiah, and Jesus is that Messiah.

It's a story that is hard to believe. Moses had been dead by this point for well over a thousand years. Elijah, though, according to scripture never died. He was taken into heaven on chariot, but now is back. This story is hard to believe. I used this story with the youth group one time. And one of the kids in the youth group said, “I don't believe it. It never happened, it couldn't happen, I don't believe it.” But you know why he didn't believe? It was because of the color of Jesus' clothes. See, in the Gospel of Mark, it reads a little bit differently that the story we read today. Because it says that Jesus' clothes became a dazzling white, whiter than any person on Earth could bleach them. This young man had learned in his science class that white is the reflection of all colors. In his mind, white is white. If you're reflecting the colors then it's white and that's it. It's a finite amount and God couldn't create anything whiter than white.

Well, I went to the paint store, and I'll ask you (the congregation) what color is this? It's white. It even says so, right here, it's white. What color is this one? It's white. Now, we have the Ultra Pure White, which appears to be whiter than the white. I counted while I was in the paint store; there were over 61 shades of white. Now, if we can make something 61 different ways that's whiter than white, is it that hard to believe, if we do believe, that God can do

anything? Is it that hard to believe that God can create something whiter than white?

See, sometimes I think we look for reasons to believe. We're going through something in our lives, we think '*God, I need you here, I need you to help me fix this, I need you to be with me, I need to believe in you.*' But I also think that there are other times in our lives, where frankly, we search for reasons not to believe. Here's what happens. If I believe that this story is true, the way it is told in scripture, if I believe that that story is true, then that opens a door. That opens a door to believing that maybe God is still doing those kinds of things. That opens the door to me thinking, that if that's possible, then maybe God is at work in my life. And if I believe that God is at work in my life, then that just causes a whole lot of trouble. If I believe that God is at work in my life, then that means that thought processes change, that priorities shift, and who has time for that? So we search for reasons not to believe.

Of all things that happen in this story, this young man chose not to believe based on the color of the clothes. We search for reasons not to believe.

I'll tell you, I believe this story. I believe that this happened. I believe that it happened the way it is written in the Bible, I don't believe that it's metaphorical, I don't believe that it's symbolic, I don't believe that is parable. I believe that it happened. But I don't believe because I am any more enlightened than anyone else. I don't believe because I am any more faithful than anyone else. I believe that this story happened because I have had experiences in my life that I can not explain. Some of which have been as dramatic as this with clouds and wind. Some of which have been as subtle as the person I'm talking to, saying that very thing that I needed to hear.

Some would say that I choose to believe that God was at work in those experiences. But I'd say it's deeper than that. It doesn't come from my mind thinking that I believe in God, so I will believe that this was God. It comes from someplace deeper. Where I don't choose to believe that it was God, but I am compelled to claim that, I am drawn to that. And I'll tell you what else I believe. I believe that you were there. I believe that you were there on that mountain, regardless of what that mountain might look like for you. I believe that God has been coming to each of us. I believe that each of us, somewhere inside of us have something, have a story, have an experience, and we're not quite sure what to do with that. Look at the people we've read about. Peter, this is exactly what Peter would do in this story: something dramatic happens and Peter responds, Peter talks, Peter will not be quiet. You look through virtually any other conversation Jesus has with the disciples and Peter will be the first one to speak. And so this amazing moment happens for these people, James and John are quiet, they're not saying anything. Peter's saying, "oh my gosh, this is great...you know what we ought to do? We ought to build something. We'll build one for you, we'll build one for Moses, we'll build one for Elijah, and it will be great!" And the writer of the gospel even said Peter did this because he didn't know what was going on. But that's how Peter responds.

I doubt that the other disciples knew how to respond either, but their response was to say nothing. Even one of the people that appeared on the mountain with Jesus in the Old Testament, God tells Elijah, "go up to the mountain and I will come see you." The scripture

says that there was a huge fire and Elijah looked for God in the fire. But God wasn't in the fire. There was a huge earthquake and Elijah looked for God in the earthquake. God wasn't in earthquake. Then there was silence. There is one translation that puts it, that I just love that still, small voice. And that's where God was.

I believe that we all have these stories. I believe that God has already been at work in your life, in my life. Maybe we didn't recognize it; maybe we were looking in the earthquake. Maybe we think that the only way to have a mountain top experience is to be literally on the mountain top. But I don't believe that. But I believe that God has been with each and every one of us, and calling out to us, and in these experiences, in these times when we look back on something, and we think '*wow, that was weird,*' I think God was in the weirdness. I think at those times when we feel like something has really changed us and we think '*wow I'd really like to tell somebody about that, but they'll think I'm crazy,*' I believe that God can be there in the craziness.

We have these stories. We have chances coming up, retreats through Lent for people to gather together to build a sense of community, to be in a room with people where they will trust each other that maybe something they think is goofy, isn't quite as goofy as they thought. I'd love to see everybody there. But this isn't about those retreats; it isn't about plugging a program. I want you to know that I believe that God has been at work in your life. And if you've felt alone, if you're wondering and waiting for God to do something with you, I want you to know that I believe that God has already been doing it. In my hope and in my prayer in each of us is that we'll look, we'll look at those times and we might recognize that. See, it's hard sometimes when we're in the middle of life to recognize that God is here right now.

There's another Old Testament story where Moses says that God tells him, "Come up again and you can see me." But God passes before him, and we read that Moses sees the back of God. Some rabbis have interpreted that passage to say not literally the back of God, but what that means is that you'll see where God just was. And sometimes we can't see it. We're in the middle of something difficult, and we can't see that God is right here, right now. Sometimes when we get through it, we can look back and we can see it then. I believe, I believe that God is with each of us. I believe that God has been at work in my life, and in your life. And whether you feel compelled to share that with anybody else, I hope that you will claim that. Claim that story. Claim that story as your own. Claim that story as a time that God has been present in at work for you, at work through you, and at work with you.

After all, that's why we're here, isn't it? Don't we gather every Sunday to see what the One who can make something whiter than white might do in our lives? Isn't that what we are looking for? I pray that we will see it. Amen