

Matthew 17:1-9

## Fear of the Unexplainable

The unexplainable and mysterious. It confronts us daily. It is part of our folklore and part of our history. One need only think about the Bermuda Triangle and all sorts of stories may come up for you. Do some channel surfing and see how many titles of shows begin with the word mystery or unexplainable. Everything from stories of aliens to ghosts, to wondering about what happened to entire civilizations of people.

There are people who thrive on reading or watching murder mysteries. Heck, we have had our own murder mystery themed plays as part of our fun here at church. Now we tend to like it when all gets resolved, we figure out "who done it" but there are many mysteries that never get figured out. What is interesting is that we just accept them as mysteries. Unless you are researching these things, most people are just fine to sit with the unknowns, that is until it is about something in the Bible and then people what proof, they want to explain away miracles and moments, such as what is referred to as the transfiguration of Jesus, the story we heard read today.

This story is a mystery. It is unexplainable, especially in the moment. It makes a little more sense to the disciples in light of the resurrection but at the time it is more than a little terrifying. Let me remind you that these stories were not written in the moment. Sometimes we think of them more like "play by play" rather than reflection on experiences. But this was not written as it was happening. The writer of Matthew has heard this story after the fact. It would not have been written down until after Jesus' death as communities of faith were trying to find their way in the new reality of Jesus death and resurrection. And this story is one that has been shared and considered important by Christians through the centuries. In many ways it is one of the reasons those first follower and us can see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.

It was a story of witness from Peter, James, and John. Trust me, even they were trying to make sense of it as they stood there. Peter wants to do something. "Let's make dwellings" he says. It can be like that for many of us. Let get busy and do something to make sense of whatever is going on in our lives...especially when it doesn't make sense or we don't know what to do. Often it feels like doing something, anything, is better than just staying in the moment. We do it with grief all the time. We fear grief, we fear being alone, we fear unknowns, so rather than sitting with that, we start doing something...anything that might distract us.

When we do that, we miss out on the fullness of the moment. It can happen with joy as well. I don't know how many wonderful joyful moments I missed out on in my lifetime,

especially when my children were young and in their teens, because I was distracted by what I thought I needed to do rather than sit in the moment with them.

So, let's get back to the story. What did this unexplainable event look like? We are told that [Jesus'] "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. [Then] suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him." (v2-3) Think about that...Imagine it...It must have been breathtaking and beautiful. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white. It makes me think about the beauty of the Aurora Borealis, or what is more commonly known as Northern Lights. If you have seen them, you have seen how they dance and light up the sky. They dazzle us and we sit in the wonder and beauty of it all. Now take that same awe and wonder and imagine Jesus, his face shining like the sun and his clothes dazzling white.

Now, not only is this *thing* happening, but then "suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'" (v5-6) Okay, if you were in the sandals of Peter, James or John, you, like them, would likely be overcome with fear as well! They were in the midst of an overwhelmingly awesome, mysterious, and unexplainable moment. They may have found some relief in the fact that Jesus said to them as they were heading back down the mountain, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Not that they had any idea what that meant. The days in Jerusalem with the palm parade, the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection were still to be experienced. But for now, they just knew they could keep it to themselves. They could sit with the mystery of the whole thing. You can bet they had many conversations about it as they tried to explain away what they had experienced, but it would remain a mystery.

We though have the whole story, just as the followers of Jesus had in the time that the Gospel of Matthew was written. They had the advantage of some time to reflect on the experience in light of the cross and resurrection, as well as the ascension of Jesus. We can sit in the mystery of the cross, the resurrection, and the transfiguration and see them as a gift to us. Not all things need to be explained. Somethings are just to be experienced. Much about Jesus is to be experienced, not explained. Why we can sit with the unexplainable in our own lives and let that be, but have to prove everything about scripture, I am not sure, but it is a challenge to and for us.

Marcus Roskamp, a pastor who developed the theme for this series of services on fear writes, "We like explanations for what happens in our lives. Explanations give us a sense of control, a sense that we are directing the events of our days. When confronted with things that have no explanation, we get scared! We make up explanations, we try to fit them into categories so we don't have to simply live with the mystery. "<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roskamp, Marcus. [Reformed Worship 122 © December 2016](#) Worship Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. Used by permission.

I think Pastor Roskamp hit on something when he said, explanations give us a sense of control. If we can't explain something it means we can't control it. If we can't explain the transfiguration then it means we can't control Jesus or God, or the Holy Spirit. It means that God can go about doing whatever God wants with our lives. And that is enough to strike fear into us! However, God does give us minds to think and use, it is not that we are to go about with blind trust, but rather to use our minds to also experience the world and God at work in the world. To be open to the mystery of the Holy Spirit and how God moves in the world and in our own lives.

The transfiguration was a moment that Jesus' was revealed as both human and divine. He was transformed in front of the three men and they were given a glimpse of God's glory. What is absolutely amazing about this is that it can also give us a glimpse of how Christ can transform us. Jesus is in the business of transforming lives. Sometimes it is gradual, and sometimes it is mind blowing, but as we deepen and grow in faith and understanding and yes, even in our questioning, fear, and disbelief, if we are willing to step into the mystery and unexplainable presence of God then we too can become more Christ like, more the people God created us to be.

And this is not just for individuals but for the whole community of faith. I have found myself in more than one conversation this past week talking about what it means to live into our mission statement, and into our desire to be people of God. I have described it as when someone walks into our building or encounters us that, even if they can't describe it or really don't know what it is about us, that they feel or experience our love as followers of Christ. That this love is so much a part of our welcome and being that people feel it emanating from us, from this place, transforming, transcending, and transfiguring love. Maybe it could be like the transfiguration of Jesus where God's love and light shines bright as the sun through us.

One last thing of note. You may not remember hearing it or even noticed it in the scripture reading. After all was experienced, "Jesus came and touched [the men] saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.'" Jesus knows experiencing the holy can strike fear into us, really, just living out our days can make us fearful at times, yet we can trust that Jesus is present. Is with us. We may not be able to explain all things, including how Jesus is with us today in the power of the Holy Spirit, but we can experience it and not be afraid. In fact, it may embolden and empower us to love more fully, joyfully, and with grace.

Thanks be to God for Holy unexplainable moments that fill us with awe and wonder. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.