

Texts: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-42; Luke 9:28-43a

What am I doing here? I imagine that might have been a question that Peter and James and John asked themselves that day. Seems appropriate, right? They might have asked it first as they hiked up the mountain with Jesus, and then again later as they cowered in fear while Jesus' appearance changed to dazzling white.

What am I doing here?

Let me first tell you a bit about what it meant to be a disciple back in the Jewish society in which Jesus lived. Young children – well, young boys – attended school in the synagogue and were taught by a Rabbi. That early instruction primarily meant memorizing the Torah. Remember that in those days, literacy was rare, so even though those young students probably learned the Hebrew letters and how to read them, they learned mostly by rote memorization. Now think about this for a minute: we are talking about memorizing the first five books of the Bible. All of Genesis, all of Exodus, all of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This much of the Bible. You spent years learning to do that. Once you completed this education, around the age of 13, you became a member of the synagogue. For the most part, that was the end of your education. Once they were done, students learned the family trade – carpentry or fishing or farming or baking or oil-pressing. But a few, the best and the brightest of the students, would continue to study under the instruction of the Rabbi. And a very, very few might be chosen to follow one of the great Rabbi's and given the chance to devote their lives to his teaching.

Jesus did not choose his disciples from the best and the brightest of the synagogue students. We don't know whether Peter and James and John had gone to synagogue school. What we do know is that Jesus called them from their fishing boat. He called them

away from a regular day at work, and they left everything behind to devote their lives to following him. But I will bet that if we could ask them, they would say that they never imagined that being a disciple meant that they would be hiking up a mountain with Jesus.

Luke tells us that Jesus was going up the mountain that day to pray. And this detail is worth exploring a bit. All through Luke's gospel, we find Jesus praying. Jesus prays at his baptism (3:21). He prays as he goes about the countryside healing people (5:16). He prays before he names the 12 apostles (6:12). He prays before teaching the prayer that we call the Lord's prayer to his disciples (11:1). He prays on the Mount of Olives before he is arrested (22:41). And he prays as he hangs dying on the cross. (23:34). Jesus' life is soaked in prayer. And it is in those moments of prayer that God's presence is revealed, to him and to us, his disciples. God's presence permeates everything that Jesus says and does.

For Peter, James and John, it's a bit different. Luke tells us that they are weighed down with sleep. So much so, that they almost miss what comes next. As Jesus prays, his appearance becomes dazzling white, and suddenly Moses and Elijah are standing next to him. Luke tells us that they are talking of Jesus' departure. This is the next detail to explore in this story. Because the word that Luke uses, the word translated as "departure" is the word "exodus."

For Jewish people, the exodus from Egypt is the central story of their salvation. It is the story of how God rescued God's chosen people from slavery and brought them to freedom with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Luke tells us that Jesus' exodus is about to be accomplished at Jerusalem. We know what is going to happen in Jerusalem. For Christians, the cross is the central story of salvation. It is the story of how God rescues God's people from the slavery of sin and

death, leading us into the freedom of resurrection life. This time, however, the mighty hand and outstretched arm belong to Jesus. Jesus' arm is stretched out on the cross. Jesus' hand is nailed to the cross. Peter, James and John don't yet know what it means to travel with Jesus to Jerusalem. But Luke the gospel writer knows. And we, Luke's gospel readers, we know, too.

This is the center of our faith. This is what we believe and claim. God's glory is found in the place where you least expect to find it. God's glory is found in a feed trough, surrounded by shepherds and animals. God's glory is found in the words and deeds of that baby, now grown up. That rough Rabbi whose disciples were fishermen and tax collectors and women who had been cured of demons. God's glory is found where that same Rabbi hung and died on a Roman cross, forgiving those who killed him, promising paradise to the criminals dying beside him. God's glory is found right here, in these simple elements of water, wine and bread, in the promise that that Rabbi Jesus, the Son of God, made to you.

In that flash of dazzling light on the top of the mountain, Jesus was changed. Peter and James and John came near to missing the moment until they heard the very voice of God speaking through the cloud: "This is my Son, the Chosen. Listen to him." Here is God's command, to Jesus' disciples that day and to us, his disciples this day. Moses brought God's word down from a mountain to the people of Israel – 10 commandments carved on stone tablets. Jesus, God's Son and God's Word, came down from another mountain and we are given the commandment to listen to his words.

On Wednesday, we will begin our own journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. We will spend 40 days in prayer with Jesus, listening to his words, listening to the words that his disciple Paul wrote in the book of Colossians. And my question to you this morning is this:

What does it mean to you to listen to God's Son? What other voices in your life are clamoring for attention? How do you block that clamor so that you can truly listen? I invite you in these next 40 days, these next 6 weeks, to find a space of silence and prayer to listen – really listen – for Jesus' voice.

Finally, the end of the Gospel story. Jesus, Peter, James and John come down from the mountain, down from that dazzling moment of light and glory, back down to ground level. And the first thing Jesus does is to heal a young boy who is possessed by a demonic spirit. The glory of God's presence and the pain of the real world cannot be separated.

How many of you have spent time at the overlook point in Chadron State Park? What a spectacular view you have from up there – almost 360 degrees. It's easy to understand why people have worshipped on mountains for as long as there have been people. You can see so much from the top of a mountain. But what you can't see from is individual people, individual lives. And there comes a moment when it's time to come back down, to leave the holy place and bring that experience of God's presence back with you to the daily routine. Back to the tooth brushing, the telephone answering, the doing your homework, the grocery shopping, the TV watching, the dealing with people you work with.

What are we doing here? Nothing less than God's own work.

These two stories cannot be separated. Jesus came down from that mountaintop moment to heal a boy and to give that boy back to his father. To restore a relationship that had been torn apart by the power of evil. We are called to do the same thing. We who call ourselves disciples of this Rabbi Jesus, the Son of God – we are called to follow him up the mountain and back down again. We are called to pray as he did. We are called to soak our lives and our ministries in prayer, as he did. We, who know ourselves to be forgiven

and reconciled to God by the blood Jesus shed, we are called to do the same work he did – the work of forgiveness and healing and reconciliation.

And we are called to listen to his words. In the 40 days of Lent, I invite you to find space in the busy-ness of your life to stop and listen. I invite you to live in God's Word. To feel his presence. To walk in his path.

What are we doing here? Gathered as the body of Christ, we are here to sing, to pray, to offer our gifts, to eat a meal, to bless each other and to share God's peace. And when we do all this, we can see the glory of God. Amen.