

## **Questioning, Believing, Seeing, Hearing and Questioning etc. Again based on Mark 9:1-9, David Jahnke, 7/5/15**

Today I want to talk about questions. The whirlwind of big events in our nation the last couple of weeks raises lots of questions. First and foremost and always present in the modern world, is “Are you up there Lord?” and “What do you want from us?”

Today we heard of a voice up there, coming from a cloud. The disciples were expecting the Kingdom to come in power and now three of them were finally able to see Jesus in his glory with two dead but now living prophets. But generally speaking, *we have not* had such concrete religious experience.

An agnostic friend had a question. He asked me how we would know when Jesus returned. I told him that at that time, everything that was hidden would be disclosed. So everything will be clear. But I acknowledged that now, many things are hidden.

Even the disciples wanted to see and hear God. “Show us the Father, Jesus!” said the disciple Phillip. Is this not our deepest yearning too? “Show yourself to us God! Erase our doubt! Help us to know for sure!” At the second service, we sometimes sing, “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. I want to see you.”

Jesus said the problem is one of faith. To those who were starting to persecute him he said this: “37 You have never heard my Father’s voice nor seen his form... *because you do not believe* the one he sent.” [John 5:37-38]

How can we experience something we do not believe in? Can we experience love if we do not believe in it? Will we feel peace if peace is but a dream to us? Will we give gladly if we do not believe in giving? And how can we believe in these things if these things have not come to us and been shown to us?

The same goes for God. How can we see and hear the one who is so much greater than all of these wonderful things and thus more elusive, if we do not believe? And how could we believe in God unless God has come to humanity and revealed himself?

Think of a child whose Father never came near to him; never spoken to him or held him in his arms. How could that child believe in his Father’s Love? He would scorn his father. But when the Father has come and shown his love, his care, his mercy, his truth— then the child has every reason to believe in him. And God did that in Jesus. And God does that through His Spirit.

We see all of this and so much more in the gospels which were written so that people might believe and grow in faith. And as that happens, Jesus keeps sending his Spirit into our hearts and minds, opening our eyes and ears to the Love of the Father within and around us.

All of this is in the crux of Mark's gospel—the turning point right in the middle of the gospel, chapter 8. Jesus' power reaches a pinnacle as he opens the ears of a deaf man and brings sight to the blind. The reader is called to ask, "Have my ears been opened up to hear God? Have my eyes been opened to see his glory within and around me? If not, why not?"

The key to hearing and seeing God comes next when Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do the people say I am?" "Some say, John the Baptist, others Elijah or a great prophet from the past." "And you?" asks Jesus. "Who do you say I am?"

All of our questions get wrapped into this one question from Jesus. And Peter is the first one who dares to say, "You are the Messiah." And right after this, Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain where they see Jesus in his glory; and they hear the voice of God coming from the cloud.

Now Jesus may choose to reveal his glory before we come to believe he is the Messiah. James and John had not made their confession but they saw Jesus transfigured. There are some who have true religious experience but have not explicitly professed Jesus. And they walk with him just as these disciples did.

At the same time, Jesus may choose to not reveal his glory to us despite our faith. None of the other disciples got to go up the mountain with them. And the risen Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

So there is nothing special about these three disciples that gave them a certain privilege that others cannot have. Think about Peter. He rebuked Jesus right after confessing he was the Messiah. A little later he made a fool of himself up on the mountain with Elijah and Moses. James and Andrew thought their experience with Jesus meant they were special so later they asked him which of them would get to be at his right side in his glory!

I am kind of tired of people thinking they deserve privilege. A facebook friend from down south posted a picture of the Egyptian pyramids which posed the annoying question, "Should we take down these monuments of slavery too?"; as if his cultural heritage gives him the privilege of maintaining a symbol—the confederate flag-- which has always been linked to hatred and racism and oppression. One his friends from down south did not take kindly to his post either and wrote:

"We still have my grandfather's great grandfather's letters from when he served in the confederate army. He was a good man. And I'm sure he is in heaven right now, looking down, hoping his descendants will take down the confederate battle flag."

Amen. His ancestor is looking down with Elijah and Moses and James and John; they are all alive in Jesus but he is the only one who really shines. None of the others have a special place or privilege. In fact, they keep reminding us of what Jesus told James and John when they wanted privilege in the Kingdom.

"Anyone who wants to follow me must be a servant to all. So get off the mountain of privilege and lower yourselves before others. Give up your privileges. Share the same grace and love and sustenance and other treasures from heaven that you have received. If you are wealthy, share with the poor. If you are smart, go teach the simple-minded. If you are white, bless minorities and let them bless you."

We can do so repeatedly and in a way which is costly— just as Jesus' humbling himself and coming to the earth and loving and healing the wicked and the wise was costly; just as his speaking the truth to power and going to the cross were costly-- we can offer ourselves in a costly way because we know of the resurrection. We know that death and hatred and violence and promiscuity and greed and fear have no place where James and John and Jesus are. And Jesus' Spirit is gradually overcoming them here too, with our help.

The only privilege that believing gradually brings is a growing awareness and experience of eternal life in the present. But this does not mean we have all the answers; far from it. As soon as they started going down the mountain, Peter, James and John started asking questions. "What does this rising from the dead mean?" And to Jesus, "Why do the scribes say Elijah must come first?"

I just sent out an e-mail yesterday urging you all to spend some time with the body of Jesus on Wednesday nights. Do we expect you to know a lot and shine spiritual wisdom upon others? No...; you have some to share and we would be glad to receive it! But just come, break bread, get to know folks, ask a question or two and listen to a Word from Jesus.

Many of you are already doing this already through circles, Bible studies and small groups. And some of you listen to Jesus through daily Bible reading and prayer. Most of you hear a Word regularly in worship. Please take another step forward. Because the more we listen to Jesus, the more we want and are able to hear and feel and see Him in our daily lives.

One of our incoming officers spoke directly to this. They were asked why they felt called to be elders or deacons. And he said that over the last few years, he had been turning to Jesus for big decisions in his life. And as he did this and kept coming to church regularly, he started turning to Jesus in the smaller decisions as well. And how helpful and meaningful this progression had been to him...

This is what God wants from you; and what he wants for you. To pay more attention to his Son and receive from him the blessed life—the eternal life that God has planned for you and all of his children. So please do not let another day or opportunity go by to turn to Jesus and receive his Spirit of Love and Goodness and Grace. To the God of all grace who calls us to eternal union with Christ Jesus, be all the power and the glory, now and forevermore. And God's people say...

becomes clear as we come to believe is that we have to do a better job of listening to Jesus

Remember what other people were saying about Jesus? That he was Elijah or one of the great prophets like Moses?

Peter wanted to set up shelters for everyone

“Peter, we are not putting up shelters here. We are not staying in the same place. We are on the move.

what it is that Jesus is sa

“You have been with me all this time and still you do not know that when you see me, you see the Father?”

Jesus says to Phillip,













This same conservative friend sent “40 questions that every Bible-believing Christian who is waving their rainbow flag needs to ask.”

came to me.”

And my friend spoke of how the

What are you up to? What do you want from us?” It is

I think people h