

Lord Christ, Servant Christ

Luke 9:28-43

You and I have each come to forge a faith in Jesus Christ by walking a path so individual, so personal, so unique, that the stories of our relationships with Christ are often indefinable. Perhaps you too have struggled to find the words or experiences that can best suit what you have found absolutely compelling about your walk with Jesus. Many of you, all of you, perhaps, have chosen to believe. Yet, because faith tends to be an absolute mystery beyond human comprehension, there is no easy way to grasp this idea, this person, this Christ. There is no other place where this frustration is stretched to absurdity more than on the campus of the modern theological seminary.

Seminarians Struggle to Grasp

Silently I've sat in the back of a theology class while young pastors in training engage in heated arguments about seemingly trivial subjects such as whether or not we will still have eyes in heaven. "How will we know what Jesus looks like in the Kingdom, if we don't have eyes?" they ponder. For some people that's a very important question for their faith. To me, it illustrates how hard it is to think, in terms that our human minds can grasp, about what it is we believe as Christians. We can point to any number of pieces of Scripture to help us find our way. Stories of The Prodigal Son, or the Good Samaritan, or the Beatitudes are oft recited as formative parts of our individual faith. We can tell of our own hardship, hardship we've witnessed, and how we saw Jesus Christ acting in our lives and the lives of others near to us.

All of this defines our faith and our testimonies. But can we answer perhaps the deepest questions of our hearts? At the center of our stories and our parables, can we identify this person, this Lord to whom we have pledged our lives? It is often easier to move in circles around him rather than confront him directly but we must know, Who was Jesus? *Who is this Christ?*

The Transfiguration: An Introduction

On this Transfiguration Sunday we may get perhaps the best answer we can manage. I will admit to you that until I really looked at Luke 9 I would never have felt this way. The Transfiguration is a story that is absolutely loaded with imagery and symbolism and I could lecture for hours, I won't, but I could lecture for hours on every significant detail. In this way, the story intimidates me. It seems like it could be beyond the comprehension of a simple seminarian like me. But I have seen this story in a way that tells me exactly who Jesus was and is and I absolutely love it.

From the writings of Gage Earle Freeman:

*They stand upon the Mountain He in prayer
When sudden on His face, as when He cried –*

*Come forth, to Death a glory settling there
Shines deeper fuller now intensified
By the white light that springs in glittering tide
From out the Throne of God and now they see
His aspect changed transfigured glorified
Bright as the Sun when all the dark clouds flee
And the long beams have broke over life and land and sea*

Jesus' Demonstrations

In Luke 9, starting with verse 28, the story begins. Jesus goes up the mountain with Peter, John, and James in order to pray. And it is in the midst of this prayer, that Jesus is transfigured. His face changes, giving off brilliant rays as the sun, and his clothing shines the brightest of white. *Jesus demonstrating his absolute purity.* When you look at this scene as it is depicted in art, ancient icons show Christ standing, if not hovering, high above the three disciples, now bowing down at the glorious sight. *Jesus demonstrating his total godliness.* Next he is seen in the company of Moses and Elijah, ancient heroes from the Jewish tradition, discussing the prophecy and the law. *Jesus demonstrating his unblemished righteousness.* The scene is regal, nearly euphoric. Hovering above the disciples and all of creation, Christ shows that he is King, he is Messiah, he is Lord over all.

But what does Jesus do immediately after his transfiguration? He descends from his high place on the mountain and is immediately confronted by a man whose young son is being consumed by an evil force. *And he heals him.* He didn't ignore the boy. He didn't pretend that he couldn't hear the father's calls. He didn't delegate it to the disciples, in fact, they had already tried to heal the boy and had failed. Friends, here, right here, in the midst of the Transfiguration we find the true nature, the true character of Jesus Christ. He was a King, sinless, entirely righteous, entirely pure, humanity's greatest leader and yet his entire ministry *was to serve*, to be with those underneath him. Somehow he creates this balance between Lord Christ and Servant Christ. No king, no president, no leader, can match this unbelievable example.

Getting Past the Switchboard

When I was in 12th grade I took a class with a teacher named Mr. Savarese. One day in class we were talking about the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh. I have no idea why, just, bear with me. So a fellow student of mine asks where the Chancellor was originally from. Mr. Savarese didn't know the answer off the top of his head. So the student, jokingly, said, that's okay, I'll just call him up and ask him myself. Mr. Savarese scoffed and said, you can't just call up the chancellor and talk to him. Now, you know how these things go between men. A challenge had been set. So quickly, a bet was made. The student had one month to get the chancellor on the phone. If he could, he got an automatic A for the class. If he couldn't, he had to sing a song in front of our entire class. And you know how this turned out. A month later he was croaking his way through a song so terrible I must have scorched the memory from my mind.

The Pitt chancellors of the world don't take phone calls from high school seniors. Just like the Mario Lemieux's of the world don't sit in the very highest row of Mellon Arena. And the Luke Ravenstahl's definitely don't drive the snow plows.

In this way, Christ clearly stands out. He could have been a mighty military ruler, he could have been a masterful politician, he could have been a persuasive celebrity. *No*. Christ himself said that the Son of Man came, *not to be served*, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. From Philippians 2 it says that "Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God, as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, *became nothing*, taking the form of a slave, born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross."

Lord Christ, Servant Christ

This is who Jesus was. Lord Christ, Servant Christ. And we are, somehow, supposed to model our lives after that example. We are called to live pure lives, lives that are righteous, living in ways that reject the world and all of its brokenness. The temptation, though, is that we aspire to all of those things because it might get us something in return. How easy it is to aspire to purity so that we can feel better about ourselves? How easy is it to want to be righteous because we think we can earn salvation? I'm not sure it's possible to entirely rid ourselves of those feelings, but I know that if we are going to truly live in the example of this Lord Christ, Servant Christ, we need to think about living our lives, hoping to be better, hoping to serve others for the simple, singular reason that the world needs more righteousness. The world needs more servants.

The world needs more purity and more holiness and it's not going to happen if we all have ulterior motives. It's not going to happen if we wait for someone else to step up and do it for us.

What the world needs is for us to become transfigured, just as Christ was transfigured, so that our faces and our bodies could change. Our attitudes and our desires could change. Every bit of who we are could be consumed by the radiating, blinding, cleansing light that comes directly from God, with rays that break over all life and land and sea.

If we allow Christ to live in us then we can be the bright beacons in a world of utter darkness. We can come down the mountain and serve those who most need serving.

Because if we aren't going to be the ones to be righteous,

who will?

If we aren't going to be the ones to be holy in this world,

who will?

If we aren't going to be the ones to be loving in this world,

who will?

If we aren't going to be the ones to live like Jesus lived,

who will?

Daniel T. Getkin
Youth Director
Bower Hill Community Church
Pittsburgh, PA
14 February 2010