

Just Jesus

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Matthew 17: 1-9

It was a 1967 Chevrolet Chevelle and it was the first car I ever owned. It had been the family car that was eventually given to my older brother. He, in turn, *sold* it to me, of course. But, even so, it was a good price, one that a poor college student could afford. I was in my sophomore year at Virginia Wesleyan and the idea of finally having my own car was a very big deal. My brother was living out in Southwest Virginia, somewhere close to Chilhowie. So, I took my money and the bus out there from Va. Beach and bought that car.

The next morning I set out driving my car back across the state. And let me tell you, I was feeling good! I had my own car! I had the 8-track tape player going, and it was a warm sunny day. I had the window rolled down. I had arrived. And then it was, along about Roanoke maybe, I was in a line of traffic at a stop light and I looked down to check the map. As I was looking at the map, out of the corner of my eye I noticed the line of traffic next to me was starting to move. So, thinking that the light had changed I let my foot off the brake, and was soon met with a jolting thud as I rammed the car in front of me. *My* light had not changed.

The first day I owned a car. Just when you think you've finally arrived something happens and you realize you still have a long ways to go on this journey of life. I think that's what it must have been like for Peter, James and John. Jesus "led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." What a high moment in their lives. It's certainly rightfully called a "mountaintop experience," isn't it? And I mean they are Jesus' inner circle! He takes only them up the mountain and he's transfigured only before *them*. And then, as part of this same vision Moses and Elijah appear to them, standing there talking with Jesus. They have arrived!

This, in a sense, has got to place them right up there *with* Moses when he saw the burning bush, or with Elijah when he called down the fire of heaven on his sacrifice in that great contest with the priests of Baal. They must have at least thought that life was going their way now. So, you remember, Peter speaks up and says excitedly, "Lord it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three booths," three tabernacles as it were, "one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." I mean, they have their arm resting on the window sill of that '67 Chevelle and they're feeling good. And then, thud. A voice from a cloud says to them, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" And with *that*, they fall to the ground in fear!

If it were just a matter of awe, why didn't they fall to the ground when Jesus was transfigured, or when Moses and Elijah show up? No, it's that just when they thought they were somehow privileged, they get a big-time scolding. Whatever they thought they had all figured out, this voice says they have another think coming. We like thinking that we have things figured out or that we have life going our way. Just last Sunday we were feeling that way about our accompanist situation in worship. Finally, after four months of searching, Samantha had come along. And she was happy to be here with us, and we were happy to have her and it looked like that was going to work out really well. It seemed like we had things going our way again. We obviously can't speak for Samantha and what she was feeling inside and what she was struggling with. We were just beginning to get to know her, weren't we?

But, by all accounts she had a lot of positive things happening in her life. In addition to here employment here, she had just started in new job which she was apparently very good at and enjoying very much. Which I guess just goes to show, as is the case in this gospel text, that things are more than they seem, that we are more than meets the eye. I can't figure it out. I've been trying to all week. It just doesn't make any sense. We don't know what it was, but she must have experienced some big "thud" in her life. And, we, because of what she did in

response to that, have also experienced a thud, one much more jolting than just being without an accompanist again.

What happens then? What happens when we get lost, or just when things seem to be going our way, we hit a brick wall? What happens when suddenly we realize we really don't understand much of anything at all? We like thinking we have things figured out or that we have life going our way. But, the fact is, most of the time that's probably an illusion. It's like in this story from Matthew. But, there's a unique answer here, too. Listen. When the disciples realize suddenly they don't understand at all and are overcome with fear, there's an answer for them. God tells the disciples to listen to and to see only Jesus. And it's not the transfigured Jesus. It's not the one that just *they* got to see.

The answer is not staying with the awe that their vision of who Jesus really is has inspired in them. It's not even worship, at least not in the ritual sense of building tabernacles and putting up altars at which to pray. No, the Jesus they are to listen to is this human man standing there touching them, telling them not to fear. It's just Jesus. It's the one anyone can see. It's the one who continues through it all to give himself away in love, even to the point of death. They're just to listen to and keep their eyes on him.

We could do a lot worse than that, all of us. And maybe that's all we can do sometimes, just keep listening, just keep looking at him, at the way he lives his life, especially when things seem so incomprehensible. Sometimes we're left just trying to listen, aren't we? But, maybe that's all we really ever need to do as well. I think this story is trying to tell us that. It's trying to tell us that this very human, very vulnerable one is God. And so, maybe life isn't to figure out. Maybe it isn't something to gain power over, like our versions of God do, but just to keep living in, in love. Isn't that our call if we listen to and see only Jesus?

Our call is to be transfigured ourselves. But, our transfiguration is not into something bright and dazzling. Rather, we are to be transfigured into persons like Jesus. We are to be transfigured into persons who attend to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. We are to be transfigured into persons who attend to the poor and the unwanted, to the stranger among us, and to those in need. We are to be transfigured into persons who practice loving enemies. We are to be transfigured into persons able to even give our lives away for the sake of that love of enemies and sinners. Persons like Jesus.

It's why we come to this meal together, isn't it? He assures us here that anybody and everybody has the eyes they need to see him, as real as bread and wine, as real as the person standing in front of you or behind you in line. And he offers us his life as that which will sustain and transfigure our lives. You are what you eat, after all. So, come. Come, once again. Be still and listen to him. Keep your eyes on him. It won't answer all your questions. It won't be a figuring it all out. But, it will be all that you need to live life in a true way, even amidst all that is dark and all that is incomprehensible. Come. He waits to touch you, saying "Do not be afraid." "Just keep your eyes on me."

Amen.