

Camp Hill Presbyterian Church
February 14, 2021
Sermon delivered by Visitation Pastor Don Potter
“Privileged to See”
Based on II Kings 2:1–12 and Mark 9:2–9

The sports section of The New York Times newspaper carried a human-interest story about two umpires in the Texas League. It was during the first game of a double-header that they were mercilessly assaulted with rude gestures and profanity, pelted with beverage cans, food wrappers, and half-eaten hotdogs with all the fixings.

After intermission between games, the teams on the field could not find either of the two umpires; they had disappeared. Some people thought the two guys left because of the rough treatment they had received earlier.

But after several minutes, the umpires were found sitting in the grandstands. People asked why they weren't down on the field doing what umpires are supposed to do. One of the umps spoke up and said: “It seems that you folks can see better from up here than we can down there, right next to the bases. So, we decided to call the game from up here in the stands.”

Once again, those poor guys were on the receiving end of the “boos” and “hisses” of many people in the stadium.

This only goes to prove that some people just see more than others do; or, at least they think they do. I know people like that, and you probably do, too.

Like your spouse, or significant other. They always seem to have two, or three, more little projects for you to do around the house. And as you get the details, you also hear those infamous works, “...and it won't take long,” or, “it won't cost that much, either!” Ever hear anything like that? It's the “honey-do” list: “Honey, do this; honey do that”!

And kids are familiar with this! You are amazed at all the big and little things your mom and dad find for you to do, especially on Saturday morning when you want to sleep in because you stayed up so late watching movies, or texting...

The truth is that some people are just blessed. They seem to have better vision than others. They have the gift and knack of seeing what “normal” people cannot.

This relates to the Old and New Testament scripture lessons for today. The lesson from II Kings seems to have been especially written to dazzle us. The story is really a church school teacher's dream. It has many elements that kids really love: action, excitement, drama.

Elisha is a budding young prophet. He was privileged to see his great teacher Elijah taken away into heaven before his very eyes. A chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire appeared. Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, got whisked away into heaven by a whirlwind. As he stood watching this awesome event, Elisha cried out, “Father, father!” as his teacher was carried away from him.

It is worth mentioning that Elijah and Enoch, father of Methuselah — the man who lived to the ripe old age of 969 years — were the only people who were carried away into heaven, according to the Bible. Enoch's story is found in Genesis 5.

The lesson from II Kings today is exciting and captures our imagination. As a young man, Elisha was chosen to succeed Elijah, Israel's greatest prophet. Elisha was called and commissioned to follow in the steps of his predecessor as a mighty messenger of God.

Fast-forwarding to Mark 9, we encounter a story that also relates to vision and seeing. This middle section of Mark's gospel records some of the most colorful events in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus' identity gradually unfolds as the promised One sent by God. We read of him always on the move, out among the people as teacher, healer, miracle-worker, and preacher, with his disciples in tow. As they see Jesus in action, the disciples slowly begin to grasp who he really is, and what claim he has on their lives.

This is especially true of Peter, James, and John in today's lesson from Mark. Jesus took those three disciples on retreat. Away from the demands of ministry in serving others, Jesus went up a mountain — a place where God often appeared to humans, as we read in scripture. And as Verse 2 relates, something unusual happened — Jesus was “transfigured” before them.

The three disciples had never seen Jesus like this before — he had an “unearthly appearance” and his clothes became dazzling white. In such a moment of awe, two of Judaism's greatest figures, Elijah and Moses, appear — Moses, the giver of Torah/instruction, and Elijah, the prophet who spoke God's word. Their presence affirmed Jesus in the special mission he was given to accomplish by God.

Bible scholars agree that this was a pivotal moment for Jesus. He was receiving the divine affirmation of God the father for ministry. Writer Frederick Buechner shares this description:

“It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels — (the three disciples) had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they'd tramped a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, footsore as the rest of them. *But*, it was also the Messiah, the Christ, in his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.”

Peter, James, and John, as the first disciples Jesus called, were **privileged to see** Jesus in a new way. What they saw and heard would have an impact on their lives as they left the mountain to go back home. Even though Peter wanted to build a set of condos and stay there forever, they had a job to do. They had a mission to fulfill. But they were different people because of what they saw and experienced.

Every now and then, something like that happens to us. Oh, it usually occurs when we least expect it, often as we go about the routine of our busy lives and schedules. Each of us has had times when we have experienced the special presence and nearness of God.

It could have been while you were in the kitchen preparing dinner, or when you spent some time with a friend or family member, or as you sat listening to a stirring piece of music, or standing barefoot in the sand at the ocean, watching the sun shimmer across the water.

Every once and so often, something so touching and amazing, so innately moving happens, that we are transfigured ... we are given a glimpse, and are **privileged to see** God, life, and even ourselves in a very different way.

A change comes over us, drawing us a little closer to God. And from that experience, we are renewed. We are not quite the same person as we continue the journey — the journey of faith, committed to following in the way of Jesus as Lord.

Several years ago, I was privileged to attend the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, British Columbia. For a week, some 2,000 Christians from across the world met: women and men, young and old, black and white. We assembled to take part in workshops, hear speakers address issues and challenges confronting the Christian Church worldwide, and to share in Bible study and worship.

Toward the end of the week, a worship service was held in which some 3,000 people attended. A massed choir of about 300 sang in French, Spanish, and English. A pastor from Kenya preached a powerful sermon about what it means to be the body of Christ.

The Archbishop of Canterbury then presided at the Lord's Supper in which that whole gathering took part, affirming our oneness in Christ. It was for me an emotional experience. There was something overpowering about being there with all those people, sharing in the liturgy and music and receiving the bread and cup — and I wept. I was stirred so deeply that I felt “transfigured” myself ... changed by the living presence of Jesus Christ.

And from that “spiritual high,” the participants of the Sixth Assembly were sent back into the world. Back into our towns and villages across the world, we were commissioned anew to share in word and deed, the living reality of God in Christ.

Jesus and the disciples left the Mount of Transfiguration as different people. As we encounter Christ anew in our daily lives, we are changed and transformed people — people through whom God works today. And the truth is — we have much to do!