

Christ Will Come...Today?
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Mark 9.1-8 Aug. 10, 2008

Mark, writing in about the year 70 CE, some 40 years after Jesus' crucifixion, puts these words into the mouth of the Jesus of his imagination: "I say to you there are some standing HERE who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come in power."

We'll see that phrase in other places, where the hearers are being told that IN THEIR LIFETIME they will see the return of their messiah, or "Christ." But Paul said something similar 15 years earlier, and some people were probably saying it shortly after Jesus' execution. They've been waiting for decades already and Mark is convinced the wait is almost over; and maybe it was, and maybe it is...

In verse 2 of our reading today we are told that after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Already, there is a wealth of symbolism that we should not ignore.

In the bible, the high mountain is where a prophet goes to encounter the Divine. The Mountain top experience is a metaphor for being in the presence of God. So Jesus is taking others into the presence of God, showing them how to access the power and presence of God, that kingdom which is always at hand.

When does Jesus do this? After six days, but six days after what? We remember from the first creation myth we read in Genesis that God creates the world in 6 days and then rests on the 7th (Genesis 2.3). So, is "after six days" a way of affirming a time of Sabbath, a way of saying, to go on the high mountain, that is, to enter into the presence of God, we need to make sure we have a day of rest and worship each week to recharge, re-energize, and renew? Perhaps that is why it is after six days.

Or, we may remember from the book of Exodus that Moses took a friend with him up a high mountain. Moses takes Joshua up the mountain of God where the Shekinah glory of God, in the form of a bright cloud, covers the mountain for SIX DAYS and on the seventh Moses hears the voice of God (Exodus 24.16).

Shekinah is a word used in ancient rabbinical literature to refer to the glory of God. "Shekinah is a feminine noun in Hebrew, it is the maternal nature of God...the presence of God is not just experienced as a father but also as a mother, and after communing with the maternal presence of God for six days, Moses and Joshua are able to actually hear from God. Perhaps Mark is using this sixth day to remind us that it takes on-going communion with God, who is as much our Mother as our Father to be able to really hear from God in our lives. It takes time to learn how to hear, recognize, and respond to the still small voice of divine truth.

In any case, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John...why those three? Charles Fillmore believed that each of the apostles represented a spiritual quality. He identified Peter with the development of Faith, James with Wisdom, and John with Love. Perhaps Jesus is taking Faith, Wisdom, and Love, the trinity of his being up the high mountain, the presence of God, because it is faith, wisdom, and love that will guide his mission and those are in fact the qualities of God. To enter into the presence of God is to be transformed and to increase in the experience of faith, wisdom, and love.

Jesus, with his friends goes up the mountain, and Mark says, "Jesus was transfigured...and his clothes became dazzling..." In Eastern mysticism, faces and bodies (including the clothes that cover them) of the righteous are often depicted as beaming with divine illumination.

Also, we remember the story of Moses on a high mountain with God, coming down and having been in the presence of God his face had become radiant or dazzling (Exodus 34.30).

Furthermore, 15 or 20 years before Mark's gospel, St. Paul said, "All of us gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the **same image** from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3.18).

Mark is continuing the tradition of depicting communion with God as being something that releases divine light in our lives...we shine with the very holiness of God in whose image we are made when we allow ourselves to believe in the God of our being, and to encounter the divine light and love that is always within us.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration may actually be the story of our own! When we experience *the glory of the Lord we are transformed into the SAME IMAGE from glory to glory...*

The next thing we see in Mark's story is that Moses and Elijah show up. We've already recalled some stories of Moses on the mountain of God, but Elijah also spent time on the mountain (1 Kings 19.11). And now, with Jesus on the mountain, they return, the symbols of the law and the prophets, that is, the symbols of scriptural teaching...those teachings that encourage faith, wisdom, and love can be seen in Jesus' life. And in the lives of those who go into the presence, to experience their own divine potential.

What is the bottom line of scripture, the law and the prophets? "Do unto others whatever you would have them do to you. **THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS**" (Matthew 7.12).

Living a life of kindness, generosity, and goodwill, this is what the bible teaches. It isn't about who to blame, who to be against, who to hate, who to change, who to convert...it's about treating the next person with the dignity and compassion you would like to receive. And the symbols of that simple but world changing message are present in Mark's story to show that Jesus is showing the way of life-giving love.

Then, Peter wants to pitch three tents to mark the occasion. He didn't know what to do, but he wanted to do something. Other than on the mountain of God, where was the Shekinah glory of God experienced? When people gathered to study the scriptures, or to pray, in the tabernacle, and in the Temple. In fact, a tabernacle is basically a tent!

So, building shelters, or tents, is actually a reasonable response to the glory of God. When we experience God, we want to give, we want to share, we want to create, we want to do something good! Peter's response is appropriate.

Then, in the Mothering Presence of God, with wisdom, faith, and love attending, we hear the voice of God saying about Jesus, "this is my child. Listen to him."

Listen to him...don't make him into an idol, don't create a lot of complicated doctrines about him, listen to him and do what he says...love your neighbor, work for justice, resist oppression, pray for one another, include those who have excluded, cultivate wisdom, faith and love, and make time to intentionally spend time in the divine presence. "Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them."

Listen to Jesus; follow his example. And when we hear that message and embrace it, we see only the Christ of our being, the perfect Idea that we are in the mind and heart of God. We see our goodness, and we commit to sharing it with the world.

“I say to you there are some standing HERE who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God HAS COME in power.” Mark says, the return of Christ, for some here, is immanent...and then he shows them how.

The return of Christ happens when we go inward into the presence of God,
that high mountain of our own soul,
and we take with us the wisdom, love, and faith that God has poured into our hearts,
and devote ourselves to that experience,
following the Christ-way of love and hope and healing and compassion,
and we are bound to experience the power of divine glory so powerfully that we wind up seeing only
the Truth,
only the Christ within;
and in that moment, for us anyway,
Christ has returned in power and in glory and the Christ-light can shine through us to bless the world
around us.
“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1.27).

We say it every Sunday: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ WILL come again!*

I stand here willing to say exactly what Mark from the Christ of his being said, “there are some here TODAY who will experience the coming of Christ in their own lives.”
Not something out there, but something right here, right now.
And with that experience will come hope and healing and happiness.
Today, we can enter into the divine presence within, that high mountain of God , and discover there
the Christ in US, the hope of glory.

This is the good news. Amen.

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I turn within to the presence of God.
In God’s presence I discover the Christ of my being.
In Christ I am whole and free.
In Christ I am healthy and prosperous.
In Christ I am alive and full of joy.
And so it is! Amen.

“Many years ago a man named Jesus discovered that all his potential was actually within his own being. He could actually say that God was within him and that he was within God...The Christ within is really your true essence...” – William Warch