

“What Do We See from the Mountaintop?”

Exodus 24: 12 – 18 Matthew 17: 1 – 9

Rev. Wayne E. Gustafson, D.Min.

February 3, 2008

We interrupt this worship service to bring you a special CRNN News Bulletin! (That’s Cable Religious News Network)

We have it from a reliable source that Jesus of Nazareth and three important members of his cabinet were seen descending from a high mountain. Our source reports seeing a glow about them, and rumor is spreading that while on the mountain they saw several dead prophets... And furthermore, another rumor is spreading that God identified this Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Our source says that Simon Peter, chief of staff to the Messiah is very upset with their response to this mysterious event. He is reported to have said, “This was so important that I thought we had an obligation to stay there and build an institutional structure to preserve this unique and world changing event for posterity. How will the people ever know what happened on that mountain otherwise? We have to make sure that they understand the correct meaning of this momentous event.” When asked what that orthodox meaning might be, Simon Peter was unwilling (or perhaps unable) to comment further.

CRNN commentator and Gospel writer, Matthew, has spoken with another cabinet member, one John (who, we believe, is the younger brother of Simon Peter). He denies that anything happened at all. “We just went on an outing to the high mountain for some recreation and prayer”, he reports. These more dramatic rumors must, then, have come from the Office for the Preservation of Right Religion, perhaps from Jerry Patwell, himself. John’s own words support that speculation, “Those Scribes and Pharisees have been after Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. Apparently they think he is some kind of threat to their power. They must think that this so-called “transfiguration” proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is trying to take down the government for his own purposes. But nothing happened! (And even if something did happen, it will be very difficult to prove.)”

We in the CRNN studio in Jerusalem find ourselves wondering if there is some sort of a cover-up in the making surrounding this mountaintop experience. But we have no idea what purpose a cover-up could possibly serve.

While we have no answers to our speculations, we do have some new information from a CRNN poll taken just this morning.

- Our poll indicates that 50% of respondents think this is a private matter, that mountaintop experiences are personal and private, and that it has nothing to do with them.
- 10% believe the rumors and are calling for a take-over. They are hoping that Jesus will use his God-given power to bring on the heavenly armies to defeat the occupying Roman forces and throw out their pharisaic henchmen.
- and 25% are still asleep and have no response.

Well, folks, it seems likely that something happened up there, but we may never get enough verifiable information to know for sure. Perhaps all we can say at this point is that Jesus will go down in history as the first messianic candidate to be transfigured (whatever that means).

Our correspondent, Matthew, has just caught up with another of Jesus of Nazareth's cabinet members. This one is named Thomas. He is well known for his practical approaches to ministry, and for his penchant to be a bit of a "doubter". He was not on the trip to the mountain, and therefore was not a witness to the rumored transfiguration. When asked about the rumors, he said, "Whatever happened to them, happened to **them!** I wasn't there. I don't really care about what happened to them. If it happens to me, then I can say something about it. In my judgment, they shouldn't have been up there anyway. They should have been here working with me in ministries that really matter: you know, healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and such, rather than running off to have mystical experiences in the rarefied mountain air. I promise you, though, that I will have plenty of questions for Jesus when I see him."

We go now to our correspondent from the CRNN office at Caesarea Philippi for a live interview with James - younger sibling of the one who might just turn out to be the Messiah.

"So, James, what happened up there?"

"It would not be appropriate for me to comment directly on the mountaintop experience while the investigation is pending. Suffice it to say that the rest of the cabinet should have been invited on that trip to the mountains. Look, we work very hard in our ministry with little pay, sometimes having to shake the dust of our feet in order to get out of unwelcoming towns, and often with no place to lay our collective heads. Sometimes you just need to get away, to go to the mountaintop. I understand that the view from there is world-changing...(if you catch my drift)."

Well, there you have it, folks...

It is clear that something has happened on that mountain, but Jesus and his disciples aren't saying much to clarify it for us. Time will only tell if we will ever understand what happened there. We will continue to try to get an interview with Jesus of Nazareth, himself, about this event. We don't hold out much hope that the story will get much clearer, though, because he often talks about things we aren't prepared to hear and when we ask him a direct question, he usually responds with a parable that promises to keep our CRNN theological analysts employed for millennia. Perhaps if we just observe the behavior of this so-called Messiah we will develop better eyes to see and ears to hear.

We now return you to your regular worship service.

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Well, that's quite a report. Perhaps it's time for a little of our own commentary.

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus is a familiar one, but what are we to do with it? It seems that we usually consider two choices: Either we assume we understand transfiguration or we admit we don't understand and so we don't worry about it. As tempting as it might be, let's not settle for the standard but superficial understanding that God simply gave a mystical glimpse to those disciples of who Jesus really was, so that after he was crucified, he would still have good name recognition.

Could that really be the whole story? Is this account simply a political endorsement of the front-running candidate for the office of messiah? I don't think so. We must be careful in looking at Biblical stories because we are so strongly influenced by CNN (or CRNN, if you will) style news coverage: identify the conflicting views and analyze the event to death. The underlying expectation is that one side is right and the other is wrong. And when we get simple agreement (perhaps evidenced by a majority in the polls), we conclude that we have understood all there is to understand about the story.

Instead let's look at it from some other perspectives. First of all, this account in scripture like so many other accounts is more about us than it is about Jesus. He consistently teaches that it is our faith that is most significant, that he is not a magic man, and that we will do even greater things than he has done. He stands in the tradition of prophets like Joel who sees the word of God written on our hearts so we don't have to be taught by experts (by which I mean, indoctrinated into orthodoxy).

Secondly, the Transfiguration is less about Jesus than it is about our ability to see clearly; to see that God is the one who has created all of us in God's own complex image, and that we exist to be in loving relationship with God, with people around us, and with our own inner selves. Our personal transfiguration transforms us from carrying a self-condemning attitude, to knowing ourselves as incredible works of divine art, albeit, still in progress.

Thirdly, transfiguration allows us to move beyond the either/or CNN worldview. It allows us to develop a more comprehensive and integrated way of looking at the world that includes both this and that, and that, and that...

If we do not go to the figurative mountaintop, by which I mean, if we do not create a space for prayer and reflection, apart from the internal and external challenges and busy-ness of life; if we do not allow ourselves to look at the whole picture from the perspective of the mountaintop, it will be difficult for us to maintain hope. On the other hand, if we only look from the mountaintop, and do not allow our work and our suffering to inform our visions, then we will only be capable of wishful thinking. Nothing leads us to the experience of betrayal more quickly than that. Putting all our faith in our leaders, or our ministers, or our politicians, or our doctors, or our parents, or our bosses, prohibits us from receiving the blessing of life that God gave to Jesus and that God gives to us. And here is that blessing. It is the same one heard at Jesus' Baptism and now we hear it on the mountaintop. Once again God's blessing is as much given to us as it is given to Jesus. The divine voice says: "You...and you...and you... all of you...are my beloved, you are the ones on whom my favor rests.