

West Branch Community of Christ

Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

February 15, 2015

Last Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time) TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Theme: LISTEN TO THE BELOVED

Mark 9:2–9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

2Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Central Ideas:

- ***God wants a relationship with God’s people.***
- ***Withdrawing is a spiritual discipline in which we learn we too are loved by God.***
- ***With this assurance we need not be afraid of being alone as we are about Christ’s mission.***

Exploring the Scripture

Relationships and the idea of Jesus as teacher are a few overarching themes in the Gospel of Mark. These themes are strongly related to the theme for this Sunday, “Listen to the Beloved.”

Mark’s Gospel describes Jesus’ many relationships: with God; with the crowds; with those who oppose him; and with his closest followers, his “disciples.” Jesus is the disciples’ friend and teacher (rabbi). This week’s theme is a call to Jesus’ disciples, who are deepening their relationships with him, to listen to him as he continues to teach them what it will mean to be called a disciple.

In an earlier section in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to follow him. We can only assume the reason they responded so quickly was that Jesus presented a vision (which he called the kingdom) of life that was so compelling they could do nothing but follow him. This is followed by teaching moments as Jesus shares by example and through parables. When Jesus tests Peter to see how much he has learned he asks Peter who he [Jesus] is. Peter responds to Jesus as “Messiah” or “the anointed one.” Peter’s declaration ends the first section of Mark’s Gospel.

Today’s scripture marks the beginning of the second section that ends with another declaration, that of the centurion who declares Jesus as the Son of God (Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, rev. ed., Fortress Press, 2002, ISBN 9780800634391, 166). Our scripture story takes place six days after Peter’s confession (v. 2).

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain, away from the crowds. The first lesson is withdrawal. Jesus practiced this spiritual discipline many times. There on the mountain Jesus is “transfigured” (having a non-earthly appearance). Moses and Elijah (John the Baptist) appeared with Jesus in that state. The very human Peter wants to mark the occasion by building a monument rather than just being “in the moment.” The permanency of the suggested buildings could also mean Peter would like nothing more than to remain in that place.

When a cloud appears signifying the presence of God, the disciples are afraid. But that fear is soon diminished. They hear the voice of God confirming Jesus’ “beloved-ness” and God’s presence with him. At times like this, the disciples needed to know they too were loved by God.

The scripture ends with the four descending the mountain. Jesus resumed his ministry of bringing hope to lives of everyone he encountered along the way. The disciples learned the importance of being with God to receive God’s love and that it was equally important to share that love in ministry to God’s people.