

Transfiguration A – Matt 17:1-9 - ‘If only we could stay!’

Pray: *Wonderful Savior, Lord of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man! The sun, the moon and the stars are magnificent – but you Lord Jesus, shine brighter. Speak to us this day as we gaze upon your glory and listen to you. Amen.*

I reckon that the saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words” is true. I know it’s true for me because I’m the kind of person who often doesn’t ‘get it’ when you try and explain simple things – let alone complex stuff. I often say, “Draw me a picture or a diagram so I can see what you mean.”

Now while we don’t all have the same learning style – many of us use pictures to capture special moments. I have an iPhone, and on my iPhone is a camera. And you wouldn’t believe how many snap shots I’ve taken with this thing. Because a picture can capture a special time or moment – and we can hang onto it. The problem is that I always forget to go through them and look at my pictures.

Not everyone uses an iPhone or a smartphone to capture moments – some have video cameras...digital cameras – does anyone still use a film camera these days? Film cameras were great if you remembered to develop your film...because even though they may end up gathering dust, picking up your pictures from the shop meant you had the joy of seeing those captured moments before they disappeared into the album to gather dust!

We capture moments don’t we? It’s the moment she said, “I do”. Or it’s the moment the doctor said, “it’s a girl/boy!” That moment in time that you captured the first steps your child took, the joy of a graduation – when you finish school (many of you will have iPhones out taking happy snaps of each other and all your closest friends), the first relationship, the once in a lifetime family reunion or the perfect holiday photo you took that you loved so much, you just had to blow it up and capture the moment in a frame to remember.

If only we could stay in those moments! If only life could just stop so we could continue to hang out there.

If only we could stay! Peter, James and John said that same thing, as they stood absolutely gob-smacked and dazzled at what they had just witnessed. They wanted to stay on that mountain with Jesus. But they couldn’t! Jesus couldn’t stay on that mountain either. The journey was just beginning. And so today I want to journey with you to that Mountain with Jesus and those first disciples to see a preview of glory. We may just find ourselves saying, “***If we only could stay!***”

1After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

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4Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus." Matthew 17:1-8

Peter, James and John were three men who were very close to Jesus. They witnessed events that no other disciples did. They were the three men who were with Jesus when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Peter, James and John were the three who went deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday to pray just that little longer with Jesus. Peter was asked by Jesus to get out of the boat, and walk on water ***[a picture I'm sure was burned in his mind's eye]*** Jesus, in anguish, looked down from the cross at John saying, "Here is your mother" as he entrusted the care of his mother Mary to the disciple whom the bible says he loved.

Now these three guys have another opportunity to go with Jesus to a special place. Another opportunity to see something so incredible and amazing - a preview of heavenly glory that would be engraved/captured in their minds forever. And so Jesus led them up that mountain where he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became as white as the light. Luke's gospel says that His clothes were whiter than any person could bleach them! And if that wasn't enough, Moses the great leader of God's Old Testament people and Elijah the very one taken to heaven alive and in a chariot of fire, two great heroes of faith from the Old Testament appeared talking with Jesus. The bible is certainly not boring!

Now in the middle of all this going on, Peter can't help himself – he just has to open his mouth. We know Peter pretty well don't we? He wasn't a shy bloke. No Peter was more than happy to be the first one to speak, even in situations when it might be better - just to wait a little bit and keep silent. Peter was the first disciple to say "Never Lord" you do not have to suffer. Peter was the one to swing his sword in the garden of Gethsemane cutting off the guard's ear. Peter opened his mouth in the courtyard on that Friday morning denying his Savior three times. But here is Peter again saying, ***"Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*** While Peter didn't always think before he jumped into action and started speaking can we really blame him here? At this moment, surrounded by the glory of God, with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, they were in a good place.

After all, on that mountaintop they were far from the troubles and difficulty of the valley below. If only they could stay on that mountain, Jesus, who they'd grown to love so much, would not have to go down the mountain to Calvary's Cross. They would not have to face the struggles and difficulties of the days ahead – very tough times. For just a few more moments, if they only could stay in that perfect moment.

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I think it's fair to say, we might have made a similar decision – do you think? To be alone with Jesus – it would be nice to capture that moment!

If we only could escape the heartache – the physical and mental drain of all the tough things we would love to avoid in our daily lives. If only we never had to see another credit card bill or disconnection notice. If only we could escape the ugly, fights and arguments at home. If only we could think before we speak. If only we could silence the crying and fighting of people we love. If only our bodies would work the way they are supposed to, and look the way we want them to. If only we didn't have to sit through an AGM, if only pastor would stop talking and sit down! If only things would be just the way we want them to be. If we only we could stay in this perfect moment on that mountain with Jesus.

But we can't stay there.....we have come down! But before we do, God reaches down from heaven and reminds us of one very important thing, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* 6When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus."

Now comes the most amazing moments of this account. To these disciples, terrified sinners like you and me, Jesus – the glorious God of all – comes over and does something so very simple, but at the same time remarkable. He touches them. And as their eyes slowly rise, He tells them to get up. He tells them exactly what they need to hear. And Jesus tells us exactly what we need to hear. He says, ***"Don't be afraid."***

"Don't be afraid." Simple and powerful words for heavy or burdened hearts. "Don't be afraid." Why don't the disciples and all of us need to be afraid?

Because we walk down this mountain with Jesus, to another mountain, the mountain of the cross - Calvary.

It was there Jesus would pay for sin, the sin that causes fear. It was at Calvary that Jesus paid for all of our spiritual weakness – for all the times we fail to realize and appreciate the glory of Jesus and instead look for our own glory and to what the world defines as glorious. Where every sin that you and me have ever committed was paid for. Paid on that mountain at Calvary.

And come back here on the 24th April and see for yourself that he didn't stay in the grave after His death. Instead he shattered the power of death. He now guarantees that our sins are wiped away and that we will share in His glory forever.

Because of his walk down from this mountain to die for us and rise for us, we have a glorious Savior. So if you're here today and you hurt – Take comfort that you have a glorious Savior who knows your pain and reaches out to you in love. Do you worry? Well you have nothing to worry about because you have a glorious Savior who knows every moment of your life and promises to walk with you down the mountain. Are you burdened by the pressures, demands and uncertainties of life? You too have a glorious Savior who will

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carry you through them all, and give you strength as you walk down the mountain with Jesus.

If you think that your problems will never end then there is good news! They will end in a fashion more glorious, more amazing than our minds can ever comprehend. Because of our glorious Savior, we will be glorious one day, too. We don't ask ourselves anymore, "If only we could stay here on this mountain with Jesus." We can't! We have no reason to stay! We have work to do. We have a journey to take with Jesus. We have eternal hope, that's real, that's for you.

If only we could stay with our Savior? Here's what we do know:

There isn't a day or a moment that goes by where we are separated from his love. Technology or a photo can't capture promises of that magnitude. Perhaps the exception is the picture we've seen in God's word today. The picture of Jesus transfigured on the mountain in his heavenly glory and the image of the cross of Calvary - these are pictures worth more than a thousand words. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds firmly fixed on our glorious Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ. Amen.