

## Tunnel Vision Mark 9: 1-9

God has given us gifts of sight, smell, taste, sight and touch and they are connected to the human mind in a powerful and mysterious way. They are an intricately connected part of our existence, and they can trigger a wide range of emotions. The scent of a certain brand of perfume or cologne may bring back memories of a special person or a special place long forgotten. Hearing a favorite piece of music, the words I love you or I'm sorry from a loved one, or hurtful words spoken in anger can bring tears to our eyes and a deep ache to our soul. A beautiful painting in a museum or a simply drawn Valentine card from a child bring tears of wonder and happiness and joy into our heart. The sweet taste of the bread and juice at the Lord's communion table make us yearn for more and dream of the heavenly banquet Jesus will serve us some day in eternity. Holding a newborn child for the first time or an embrace from a loved one remind us that life and love are not mere words, but truly divine gifts.

**God has designed our senses to enhance our human existence.** They often disrupt the mundane and boring routines of life and draw us closer to Him. Seeing the immense power of millions of gallons of water pouring over Niagara Falls or hearing a clap of thunder serve to remind us that we are just a tiny part of God's creation and God is much bigger than we can ever imagine. Things made with human hands can trigger a similar response. Travelling the freeway east in Pennsylvania you will approach the Ft. Pitt tunnel, seeing nothing ahead but a giant mountain, taillights, and carved rock. Ten seconds later, the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel appears, and suddenly a panoramic view of the skyscrapers, rivers, and bridges of the city of Pittsburgh appears. It is an overwhelming sight, especially when we consider the human skill, knowledge, and desire to build such a city all came from God.

If Peter, James, and John were with us this morning they would almost certainly say the most overwhelming thing they ever experienced was the transfiguration of Jesus. As far as mountaintop experiences go, it was right up there with the one Moses had when God met him face to face on Mt. Horeb and gave him the Ten Commandments. There are some striking similarities.

We can only wonder what they thought when Jesus pointed to the mountain in the distance and told them they were going up there to pray. The last time they found themselves on a mountain with Jesus their lives were changed forever when He commissioned them to be His disciples. That was nearly a year before this day, and Jesus had taken them on some amazing journeys on land and sea since then. They jumped at the chance to go MIA with Jesus, to spend some quiet time apart from the crowds and perhaps even the other disciples. But like those travelling through the Ft Pitt tunnel for the first time, they had no idea what they would soon experience.

It happened so fast that they only caught a glimpse of what was taking place. The gospel of Luke tells us the three disciples had fallen asleep. Then a great disturbance caused them to wake from their slumber, and the Scripture says they were terrified, filled with fear, and rightly so. In a split second, Jesus, the one who ate, drank, and slept with them, the one who walked with them and went fishing with them, had become a physical manifestation of the glory of God. He was transfigured, the word means to change forms and the human Jesus was now the divine Jesus. Heaven met earth on the side of the mountain and like a small child seeing Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon for the first time Peter didn't know what to say. Rather than taking in the wonder of the moment he breaks the silence and blurts out the first thing that comes to his mind. Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let's pitch some tents and stay a while.

It is good that we are here. Perhaps that was the greatest understatement Peter ever made in his life. Even though he was terrified, he didn't want to leave, and who could blame him? What could be better than being on a mountain with Jesus, surrounded by the majesty and security of God's glory? His brilliant idea was to build tabernacles or shelters on the side of the mountain presumably so Jesus, Elijah and Moses would take up residence there and never leave them. Hopefully, he would have built Jesus the biggest tent.

The words of St. Mark in verse 6 say much about Peter and for that matter much about us when it comes to our understanding of the glory of God. "He did not know what to say". He barely got his words out when a great cloud overshadowed them and a booming voice from heaven, perhaps louder than any clap of thunder they had ever heard, spoke eight words of divine glory and wisdom. "This is my beloved Son, listen to him". **When we find ourselves in the presence of the holy God, it is much better to listen than it is to speak.**

Peter didn't know what he was saying. Yes, it was good that he and the others were there, but not for the reasons in his mind or ours. His words reveal he had a fundamental misunderstanding of the glory of God. Glory is more than a pretty picture. Glory comes through suffering. Hebrews 2:9-10. I intend for us to look at that Biblical truth further in week 5 of Lent when we study John 12:20-33. The Scriptures teach that the only way to glory is the cross, and early on it was a stumbling block for Peter. Like so many today, he was caught up in living for the moment, rather than the future. If Peter had his way, Jesus would not have accomplished what He set out to do—fulfill God's will by dying on the cross for your sins and mine. If Peter had his way and convinced Jesus to stay on the mountaintop that day, heaven would not be a reality for any of us.

Peter and the others caught a glimpse of the glory of God, the glorified Christ, the One the Father loved. Yes, it was an amazing sight, but there would be much more to see. The problem was that they had tunnel vision. They had yet to hear the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:16-18. They didn't make the connection between glory and suffering; they only saw a tiny little picture of God's glory, the bright light at the end of the dark tunnel. They would not see the incredible sight on the other side, the glory of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection and His promise of eternal life, until later. In Rev. 1: 9-19, John tells us about what he saw. Aren't you thankful that God has given us the ability and opportunity to see Him as well? **Let us listen to our sixth sense, the Holy Spirit, who tells us there is much more to see than meets the eye.**

Three days from now on Ash Wednesday we will officially begin the season of Lent. That Jesus, the Jesus of the Scriptures, invites each of us to take a six-week journey with Him to a hill far away to pray, fast and study the Scriptures. The trek will not be an easy one, as climbing the mountains of sacrifice and suffering require much stamina and self-control. At times we may become weary like Jesus's first disciples and be tempted to fall asleep. But if we are willing to climb the mountains of sacrifice and suffering, who knows, we may find that God in His grace will allow us to have a glimpse of His glory as well. Seeing God's glory is not something that was just for Peter, James and John. The best thing we have ever tasted, the sweetest sounds we have ever heard, and the most amazing sights we have ever seen will pale in comparison to those which we will experience in heaven with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Until then, we must suffer. Thank God it won't be on the cross. Let us pray that we will have grace to persevere and be found worthy to be glorified with Him. Amen