

Exodus 34:29-35  
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2  
Luke 9:28-36

## **Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

This is the last Sunday of the Epiphany Season. The next season, Lent, begins this week with Ash Wednesday. The Epiphany Season begins with The Baptism of Our Lord and it ends with The Transfiguration of Our Lord – that is today. The Epiphany Season is bracketed by celebrations of identity, not accomplishment. These are not stories about what Jesus does. Jesus' baptism and transfiguration are all about who he is. As a matter of fact, these two stories are the only times in the Gospel of Luke that the voice of God is recorded speaking directly, and both times God is identifying Jesus. In the story of Jesus' baptism, Luke writes, "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" At the Transfiguration, Luke writes, "Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my

Chosen; listen to him!" The only two times Luke records the direct words of God concerning Jesus, God is not telling us what Jesus does. He tells us who Jesus is.

There is more to life than what we can see. God tells us about some things that we might otherwise miss.

The Transfiguration is a nightmare to preach about. There is no moral to this story. Jesus is on a mountain with some of the disciples; there is a vision of Moses and Elijah; and God says Jesus is his Son. Jesus does not heal anyone. There is no teaching. Jesus does not tell a parable or call anyone to be a disciple. There are no reproducible, workable, helpful, payoffs.

Throughout history, people have demanded that God tell them things they want to know. But when God wants to tell us things we might not understand, we have a tendency to brand the teaching as "irrelevant". This story does not tell us how to accomplish anything and we might have trouble thinking of a use for it. Unless we want instructions for climbing a mountain and having a vision, this story might fall into the "irrelevant" category.

This story has a relevance that transcends practicality. The relevance of this story is the news that what we accomplish is *not* the same thing as who we are. What we accomplish changes constantly, but who we are is eternal. We are loved children of God, whom God has created.

It is the same with Jesus. When God assures us that he has come to be a part of our lives as Jesus Christ, he does not tell us what Jesus *does*. He tells us who he *is*. Jesus is God's beloved Son.

It is a hard thing to understand. We still get confused about what is important. If, this afternoon, someone asked you if you are a Christian, I hope you would say, "Yes". But when the person asks, "Why?"... When a person asks why we want our congregation to be stronger... When a person asks why we teach our children to be Christians... How do we

respond? Is it a list of things we hope Christianity can accomplish? We might say our religion will help people act better. We might say we get to hang around with a better class of people (and then hope no one reads the Bible and finds out the kind of people Jesus hung around with). We might say God will help us or we want to be sure we go to heaven when we die.

Maybe the best answer to the question, “Why are you a Christian?” doesn’t have anything to do with what we do. The best answer to that question is, “We know who Christ is. And we are not afraid to honestly think about who we are.”

There is more to life than what we see.

Jesus is God. One time God told us that in no uncertain terms. We remember what God said every year on the Festival of the Transfiguration. God came to live with us as Jesus Christ. His followers saw him radiating with holiness. God had led his people with the gift of the Law, and that was symbolized by a vision of Moses, the Law Giver. God had called his people to be faithful through the prophets, and that was symbolized by a vision of Elijah the prophet. And there was Jesus, God himself.

As always, the first thing people try to do is change the question. God told us who Jesus *is*, and Peter responded by asking what he should *do*. The words are: “Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah...’”

We do not have a relationship with God because of what we do. We have a relationship with God because of what we are. We are creatures of God. He has made us. He loves us.

There is more to life than what we can see. Once, God gave us a glimpse of Jesus and told us directly who he is, but he wants us to live with that faith everyday. Even when we do not see Jesus glowing on a mountain top, God wants us to know that he lives our lives with us.

God wants us to know about the people who live around us. Even when we do not see each other with halos, or hear each other quoting Scripture, remember that everyone you see

every day is the image of God. That is who they are – and it does not depend upon what they do. The lives that surround you are precious because God created them. That qualification is far more profound than anything a person could accomplish to earn a place in the community. Those people riding with you on an elevator, the person ahead of you in line at the grocery store, the woman who delivers your mail, and the man who unlocks the place you work – a unique creation of God, every one. To see it, we have to look beyond what they are getting done.

It may be the hardest of all to see the presence of God when we look at ourselves. Harder than when we look at Jesus, and harder than when we look at other people. When we look at ourselves is when we are most likely of all to judge our worth in terms of our accomplishments. You probably know someone who has retired, or had health problems, or who has no patience with school and training and would rather start a career, and that person finds life not worth living – because that person is not accomplishing what he or she wants to. So, he or she does not find life valuable.

Lent begins in three days. Among the other disciplines of Lent is the practice of self-examination. That is a worthwhile thing to do. There is more to life than what we see. Take time to reflect on your life and let God show you the wonderful things about you that you may not have considered. Spend time everyday, thinking about your values, remind yourself of the infinite opportunities you have to make your community better, and listen to God tell you how you can make other people happier. Those are more than just accomplishments, they are ways to see the presence of God in your life.

Can you value your life just because God gave it to you? That is why God values your life. He created it. It is mysterious and profound, and God has placed it in your keeping.

God tells you something about your life while you are up on the mountain. It is the truth that you are kept in his love and grace every day that you live.

This world would deceive you. You are surrounded by the assumption that your life is only valuable to the extent that you can explain it and make it useful. This world regularly recommends that you keep track of your accomplishments to justify your continued participation in God's creation. But there is more to your life than can be seen and measured. Your life is lived with God through Jesus Christ and every breath you take breathes all the hope and purpose of his creation.