

Text: Luke 9:28-36. Transfiguration. **February 7, 2016.**

How good it is for us to be here, seeing Jesus' glory. Amen.

Life has ups and downs. I think we could all agree with that. But what about the Christian life? Does that have ups and downs? Should the Christian life only have ups? I mean, why bother being a Christian if your life is really no different and still has ups and downs? If I'm no more wealthy than anyone else, why bother? If I'm no more healthy, why bother? Because faith in Jesus gives you strength in the downs. Faith in Jesus helps you appreciate the ups. It's amazing what Christians say and truly believe, in the downs. At funerals, I've heard Christians say, "I don't know how I would get through this without Jesus." When facing serious surgery, I've heard Christians say, "I'm not afraid, the worst thing that could happen to me, dying, would be the best thing that would ever happen to me. Then I'd get to go and be with Jesus." Christians, only by God's grace, know the greatest up is yet to come. The Christian life has ups and downs, but the greatest up is heaven and all the downs in this world can't take that away.

The disciples faced ups and downs in following Jesus. Man, they saw him perform miracles, change water into wine, catch impossible numbers of fish. Nice! They saw Jesus cast out demons and then heard people spread the rumor, "Jesus casts out demons because Jesus is on the devil's side." What a downer! The disciples were with Jesus when he was so popular, thousands of people ran on foot around a lake, beating a boat sailing across that same lake, just so they could listen to Jesus. The disciples had to figure, "We are going to be the leaders of a band of thousands." Then in one day, everyone left, all because Jesus told the crowds this hard teaching, "You need to believe in Jesus to go to heaven." The thousands? Gone. Only twelve remained. But they hung on to Jesus. They kept following Jesus because they knew and believed, "Jesus, you have the words of eternal life."

The part of God's Word in front of us is a big up! But right before this, they faced a big downer. Jesus told them, "I am going to be betrayed. I am going to suffer. I am going to die." They were so down, they didn't even hear Jesus say, "I will rise again." To see them through these downs, Jesus gave them this up and what an amazing, up. I know awesome is overused, but this is way beyond awesome.

Look at the scene. Jesus took three disciples up on a mountain to pray. Maybe we can learn something about the importance of praying. Maybe ups will come when we pray. While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed! His face became different. Clothes white as a flash of lightning. White! Not many things in the desert are really white, especially before Tide and Borax. When these people were done washing their clothes with river water, we still would have considered them dirty. So the contrast. White! Dazzling, like a flash of lightning. Like the teeth in the toothpaste commercial with the little flash and the ding! This was striking, dazzling, unforgettable.

And as if that weren't enough, two guys show up. Not just any two guys. Moses. Elijah. In glorious splendor. Believers who have died are already enjoying their glory. Moses. Elijah. The two great miracle workers of the Old Testament. Really only during the times of Moses and Elijah (and a short time after them) were miracles done in the Old Testament. Only during the time of Jesus (and a short time after him) were miracles done in the New Testament. Moses, who led the people on an exodus from slavery to the promised land. Elijah, who faced off 450 followers of the false god Baal and fire came from God himself. Elijah, who did not die, but who was taken directly to heaven. Moses, who did die, but the book of Jude tells us that Jesus fought the devil for Moses' body and Jesus won. So here are two glorious

bodies, of two of the greatest miracle workers, standing there chatting with Jesus, who also has this glorious appearance, gleaming dazzling white. What an up! What a scene!

What are they talking about? Can we listen in? They are talking about Jesus' departure. This is a subtle way to talk about Jesus' death. He knew he was going to die. Soon. In Jerusalem. The word for departure is literally exodus. Jesus was going to lead his people from the slavery to sin, to the promised land of heaven. But he had to go through the terrible down of suffering, betrayed by one of his closest friends, Judas; denied by one of these guys on the mountain, Peter; and nailed to a cross. Jesus was a real human being. Even he needed this up to get him through the down that was coming. The disciples needed this up, to remind them of Jesus' glory, as he suffered and died (and they all abandoned him!) We need this up, this mountain top, this glory, to see us through the terrible downs of life, especially life as a Christian.

But let's get back to the disciples. What were they doing as Jesus' faced was changed, as his clothes are this dazzling white, as he's chatting with these two glorious departed believers, as they have a once in a lifetime chance to talk to Moses and Elijah? What are they doing? Sleeping. Sleeping? Seriously? How could you sleep through this? How is that even possible? Well, they went up the mountain to pray and Jesus liked praying more than they did. It's getting late into the evening. They've prayed all they wanted to pray. They nodded off. And like a baby sleeping through the Super Bowl, they slept right through the greatest glimpse of Jesus' glory they would have seen up to that point. What a way to turn a huge up, into a ginormous down.

Sound like anyone you know? Now, I almost never see anyone actually asleep during worship. But isn't it easy to be mentally somewhere else and miss the glory? Wonder who's going to win tonight? Wonder what the funniest commercials will be? What day do I drive the carpool this week? Where is the swim meet, the basketball game? Doesn't take much, does it? What was the sermon about? God. Jesus. Every Sunday is a special chance to see God's glory and how often are we not here and how often when we are here are we really not here? How could they sleep? How can we? How could they turn an up into a down? How can we?

Jesus did just the opposite. Jesus turned what seemed to be the greatest down, into the greatest up. Things were looking down for Jesus on the cross. Friends left him, in spite of their promises. Enemies ridiculed him, "Some Savior? Save yourself!" All the guilt, of all the sins, of all the people, of all time, on his shoulders. And Jesus turned that greatest down into the greatest up. All the guilt, gone. All the sins, forgiven. All the people, saved. All time, all taken care of. The cross, that looked like the greatest down, is our greatest up! Lifted up even higher by an empty tomb. Jesus is the Savior! Our sins are forgiven! Our greatest up is yet to come! And even now, we get glimpses of the glory to see us through the downs.

The disciples didn't sleep through the whole thing. (As I pray at least some of you are still awake.) They became fully awake and they saw Jesus' glory and Moses and Elijah. And as soon as the disciples see Moses and Elijah, Moses and Elijah start to leave. And as they are leaving Peter blurts something out. "Master, it's good to be here." Can't these guys stay? I can put up three shelters. You guys can stick around. We can hang out. You can fill me in on all this exodus stuff you've been talking about. He didn't know what he was saying, but can we blame him? If you had a chance, on earth, to talk to Moses, would you want it to end, before it even started, because you were sleeping? Peter wanted them to stick around. I get it. Peter wasn't totally off base. It was good for them to be there. They got to see Jesus'

glory. Peter and John both mention this incident in the books of the Bible God used them to write. They remembered this up and it saw them through the downs. They encouraged the weak in faith with their eyewitness testimony. It was good for them to be there.

But it wasn't good for them to be there forever. They couldn't stay. They had other work to do. There was a demon-possessed boy waiting at the bottom of the mountain for them. There was his father, struggling with his faith in Jesus because of the seemingly unfair suffering his son was going through. Peter, James and John had to follow Jesus not only on the mountain, but also on the plain.

In the same way, our Christian faith, our Christian life, has to make sense during the downs, not only during the ups. Yes, the Christian life has ups and downs. Maybe you had the huge up of inviting a friend to church at Christmas. And they actually came! And you've had the down every week since, that they haven't come back. Maybe you had the up of seeing your child tell you the good news of great joy that is for all the people. Grandma and grandpa even came to hear. Then they were fighting in the car on the way home same as every other Sunday. The ups see us through the downs. The downs lead us back to God's Word to give us another up.

The disciples heard the very voice of God, booming from heaven. This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him. This makes sense right? If Jesus is God's Son, as God clearly declared, if he is the one God has chosen to save the world, which God clearly did, then we will want to listen to him. The disciples had to listen to Jesus say some pretty unpleasant things. "I'm going to suffer and die. In this world you will have trouble. You will be handed over to my enemies. They will persecute you and beat you." But Jesus also gave them some pretty amazing ups. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. Don't worry about what to say. The Spirit will give you the words to say." They got to listen to the ups. They also had to listen to the downs.

Same with us, right? We need to listen to Jesus, in the ups and the downs. When his Words are popular and unpopular. When it's easy to follow Jesus and when it's downright hard. When Jesus' words seem to make sense to us and when they seem completely stupid and wrong. We need to listen to Jesus. He is the One God has chosen.

Do you know what these disciples endured? Do you know the downs they went through? They were whipped for talking about Jesus. And they rejoiced that God counted them worthy to suffer for their Savior. According to church tradition, which is often pretty reliable, Peter was crucified upside down. James was skinned alive. John was exiled to a remote island at the age of 90! Who considers a 90 year old man a threat? Why would they endure these downs? Because they knew the greatest up was yet to come. Because they were looking for a better home, a heavenly one.

Your greatest up is yet to come. All the downs can't take it away. All the downs can't destroy your monogrammed mansion in heaven. The downs just make us long for that mansion more. The downs just remind us we have work to do on the plain. Yes, enjoy the ups, but also thank God for the downs. Your greatest up is yet to come. Amen.