

Text: Luke 9: 28-43

Title: Missing the Point

Date: February 14, 2010

Happy Valentine's Day! So I thought it might be kind of funny to show a you tube video on the hazards of Valentines' day- sort of a blooper reel if you will. O, the videos are out there, but the language and content....? Geez, there is no way I could show those in church!. There were a bunch of videos complaining about Valentine's day. I discovered something. That there is a whole industry devoted to giving women dating advice. You can get paid for this? On gal called herself the Hollywood dating director and she had a series of Don'ts- my favorite line of hers was Don't compete with a Man, no guy wants to be with someone who is better at being a Man than he is.... I tell you, I really missed the boat on this one, if I had known women worry about this stuff when I was dating it really would have taken the stress off. I think the think I worried most about was not spilling something all over my shirt! It's too bad though. A holiday like Valentines should bring us closer together and winds up highlighting what drives us apart- and we wind up missing the point.

This, by the way, is what Luke is demonstrating in this morning's passage. Matthew, Mark and Luke all relate the Transfiguration- and we tend to blend all their accounts into on, blurring the details. This is too bad, for we often overlook Luke's version. Now, I've got to tell you, reading Luke is like taking a sip off of a fire hose- you can get a lot in a very short period of time. Luke is going to throw all sorts of clues at us as to what is going on and what is going to happen next- so many that we, like Peter, are apt to miss what really is going on here. I'll give you a hint, keep Mt Sinai in the back of your mind.

By this time, in Luke's Gospel, the disciples have seen Jesus heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead (Jairus' daughter). Jesus has calmed the storm and fed 5000. All this led Pater to declare that Jesus was the Messiah when Jesus asked them who people thought that he was. Jesus has even told them that he must go to Jerusalem, be rejected by the chief priests, be killed and raised on the 3rd day. So now it is 8 days after all of this and Jesus takes his inner circle, Peter, James and John up the mountain. We are not sure which one. Some say Mt Hermon because it is close to Caesarea Philippi where Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah. Ancient authorities claim Mt Tabor, outside Nazareth. It really doesn't matter- because Luke wants us to make the connections with Mt Sinai, where God met with Moses, demonstrated himself to the people and where he gave them the Law. Anyway, Jesus takes them up there to pray, to charge up for the long trip to Jerusalem. (Luke organizes his Gospel like an extended road trip.) Prayer is important, for the last time a voice came out of heaven declaring Jesus as God's son was at His baptism, and that too was in the context of Prayer. Luke wants us to understand, that prayer itself mediated God's presence, that Prayer is not just a Santa Claus list, but that prayer is a way for us to touch God directly.

Which is why Luke doesn't have Jesus becoming so bright that it hurt to look at him. No according to Luke, only Jesus' face changed, and it was his clothes that turned white.

Remember when the Children of Israel camped out at the foot of Mt Sinai? Moses would go into the tabernacle to pray and when he left his face would be so bright from being with the Presence of God that people had a hard time looking at it- so they asked him to wear a veil. Not so with Jesus. Jesus IS the presence of God, and we can still look at him.

Speaking of Moses, he shows up, along with Elijah. Now it's not like they had nothing to do. According to Jewish tradition, both Elijah and Moses never saw physical death, they were brought bodily up into heaven. Elijah was taken in a fiery chariot and Moses, after he watched Joshua lead the people into the Promised Land. Both Moses and Elijah prefigure Jesus- through Moses, God provides manna, which feeds thousands in the wilderness; Through Elijah, God brings back from the dead the widows son and heals people. Between the 2 of them they represent the Law and the Prophets and by conferring with Jesus they demonstrate that Jesus is superior to the Law and the Prophets. And what does Luke say that they were talking about? They were talking about Jesus' departure, his "Exodus" that would take place in Jerusalem!

But the disciples miss most of this. They were there to pray and like Gethsemane, they fall asleep. Peter wakes up, sees Moses and Elijah- and what does he do? Suggest that they make booths! Now this isn't as weird as it sounds to us, for in the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the holidays like Passover that the Jews are commanded to observe, they build booths to commemorate the wandering in the Wilderness as God led them to the Promised land. Evidently, Peter thought that Moses and Elijah were, together with Jesus, going to lead them to the new Promised Land, one devoid of Romans and Gentiles. Of course he misses the whole point, which is what comes of interpreting God's actions through our own preconceived notions.

So they come off the mountain, the disciples thoroughly spooked by what has just happened- to the point that they resolve to keep it quiet lest the other think that they are nuts. But the other disciples have their own problems. While Jesus, Peter, James and John gone, they went into business for themselves, Evidently they forgot that their ability to heal and cast out demons was dependent upon Jesus and His mission. Jesus had given them power when he sent them out to preach. They thought that the power was theirs, to be used when they wanted to use it- talk about missing the point! Of course it doesn't work that way! But the boy was still suffering, so Jesus healed him after he rebuked the other disciples.

We chuckle to ourselves when we think of how the disciples routinely miss the point of what Jesus is doing or saying. We tell ourselves that we would not be as dense if we were in their shoes. But we miss the point all of the time. This Wednesday we are going to gather over at Westminster Pres for the imposition of Ashes, ushering in the season of Lent. Now there are Christian traditions that talk about giving things up for Lent as a way to connect with Jesus' suffering. This doesn't make a lot of sense to us, for Presbyterians by and large define holiness through what we do, not what we do not allow ourselves to do. But as soon as we puff out our chests and think of ourselves as superior, we miss the point. For holiness is never about looking down our noses at other Christian traditions. We are told that Lent is a season of Prayer, a time when we prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter. So we think of Lent as spiritual spring training, designed to get us into fighting trim by the first weekend of April. See what I

mean about missing the point? Prayer is never about us, as Jesus routinely demonstrated, it is about experiencing the presence of God. When we pray for our loved ones, bottom line we are asking that they too experience the presence of God, an experience that will result in healing, or restoration or revival.

One of the guys who got this right was a 17th Century Carmelite Monk named Brother Lawrence. He entered the monastery after a brief military career. Since he didn't have the education to be an official monk, he was considered a lay brother and sent off to work in the kitchen, scrubbing pots and pans, that sort of thing. And et he had handles on prayer and word got around. Soon visitors came asking that he teach them and pray with them. He wrote a teeny book called *Practicing the Presence of God*. One of my favorite lines is, *"Men invent means and methods of coming at God's love, they learn rules and set up devices to remind them of that love, and it seems like a world of trouble to bring oneself into the consciousness of God's presence. Yet it might be so simple. Is it not quicker and easier just to do our common business wholly for the love of him?"* His idea was to do everything as if Jesus Himself had asked us to do it, than in everything we do, we do so conscious that we are in the presence of God. then our day to day tasks become acts of Thanksgiving, as we give thanks to God for our jobs, our families and our friends. Brother Lawrence got it right. I wonder if his face shined?

That is what we are going to do this Lent season. We are going to look at Lent as a time of prayer, of practicing the presence of God. we tend to think of intentional times of prayer in terms of retreat, you know, setting aside specific time to pray and meditate. Those are good things to do no doubt, but I'd like to challenge us to think of everything that we do as an act of prayer. I have no doubt that when we consciously think of ourselves in God's presence in our day to day activities, then those day to day activities are going to involve doing more good for others. And that will put us in touch with that other aspect of Presbyterian notions of holiness, that we are saved to serve, that when we get closer to God we just naturally want to help those who need help. Our Mission Committee is looking to ways for us to do just that- and lord knows that in these times there is no shortage of those who could use some help.

There are going to be those times this Lent when we are going to slip up, find ourselves thinking our ourselves first and generally missing the point of the whole season. That's OK, for we already know that we are forgiven. In fact, the whole process of noticing how we fail to live up to what Jesus would have us do; that knowledge that leads us to ask for and experience God's forgiveness- that in itself brings us closer to God! We are in a win win situation here. Intentionally turn our hearts to God and win; fail and experience God's love and forgiveness anew- which brings us closer to God- and win. That is why we sing Christ is Made the Firm Foundation.- let us pray.