

Sermon: Transitioning
Text: Mark 9:2-9
Date: February 25, 2009
Place: Jesup First UMC

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Text: Mark 9:2-9
Date: February 26, 2006
Place: Wrightsville First UMC

A man from the hills of Kentucky got a letter from the IRS to appear immediately at its Lexington office. Now, he had never been out of the hills before, but when the day arrived, he took his teenaged son and drove down to Lexington. He found the right building, walked into the lobby, and found the elevators leading to the third floor. But he didn't know what to do, so he just stood outside the elevator and watched for a few minutes. Then, up walked an elderly woman, just barely able to make it to the door. She walked into the elevator, turned around and pushed the button and the doors closed. A few minutes later, the doors opened again and magically, there stood the most beautiful woman the old hillbilly had ever seen. Immediately, he turned and started walking out the door. And his son said: "*Where ya goin', pa?*" And the old hillbilly said: "*I'm goin' home to fetch your ma.*"

Now, that's change, isn't it? An elderly woman walks in and a young woman walks out! Wow! You are I are engaged in a similar change; we are in the process of being changed from what we were into what God wants us to be. Now, the early Methodists called this process, Entire Sanctification, the process that begins with salvation and ends when we stand before the throne of God.

We are a people in transition and that means we are a Church in transition, a Church that has left Egypt in order to follow God into the Promised Land,

a Church that has left behind what we were so that we can become what God is calling us to become.

A remarkable transition took place in the gospels. Jesus spent the first part of His ministry traveling throughout Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, healing the sick and calling to Himself 12 disciples. And He revealed Himself to them, but the real question was: *“Did they get it? Did they understand who Jesus was?”* So, one day as they journeyed in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked them: **“Who do you think I really am?”** And Peter said: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”**

Then, Mark tells us about a week later, Jesus took three of the disciples, Peter, James and John, up a mountain side and while they were there, He was transfigured before them. His face began to shine like the sun and his clothes began to glow. Then, Moses and Elijah came and talked with Him. And Peter got so excited; he said to Jesus: **“Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let me build three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”** And then, a dark cloud fell on the mountain and a voice came from heaven that said: **“This is my beloved Son; listen to Him.”** And suddenly, the disciples looked up and the cloud was gone, Moses and Elijah were gone, and Jesus was standing alone on the mountain. And immediately, Jesus said: **“Follow me,”** and He lead them back down the mountain.

Now, what’s this story all about? We’ve read it a thousand times and we’ve heard enough sermons

about it. What does the Transfiguration really mean? Well, it's about a transition in Jesus' life, a change from helping His disciples understand that He is the Messiah to helping them understand what being the Messiah really means.

And that speaks to us this morning, because we are a Church in transition. There are several things happening right now that I believe are setting a course for the future of our Church for generations to come. It's exciting to see several of our small group huddles continuing to meet. It's exciting to see the formation of a new Sunday School class for our young adults. It's exciting to see the Trustees continuing their work of maintaining and improving our facilities. It's exciting to experience the early morning worship service and new forms of expression at our 11:00 service too. You see, we aren't the church we used to be; we are a Church in transition. But if you and I are going to navigate through this transition, there are at least four things we need keep in mind.

1. WE MUST CONFIRMATION OF THE NATURE OF CHRIST!

What the disciples saw on that mountain confirmed everything they believed about Jesus. Peter said: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" And on that hillside, they watched as the layers of Jesus' humanity were peeled back and they saw Him in all of His glory; they saw Jesus' divine nature.

Now, some times when churches experience transitions, they go through a time of great uncertainty. But let me confirm something for you this

morning: God hasn't changed! The Bible says, "God is the same yesterday, today and forever." Everything that the Bible reveals to us about Jesus was true yesterday; it is true today; and it will be true tomorrow. The message is the same even though our methods may change.

2. WE MUST AFFIRM OUR METHODIST HERITAGE!

Mark tells us: "Then, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking to Jesus." Moses and Elijah. Now, there is great spiritual significance to this event. These are the two greatest leaders in Israel's spiritual heritage. Moses was the law giver and Elijah the greatest prophet. And what this says is that Jesus is bringing together everything that was written in the Law and everything that was preached by the prophets. Israel's spiritual heritage wasn't being set aside; it was being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

That's what God wants to say to us this morning. There are some new things coming. When a Church goes through a transition like this, change is inevitable, but that doesn't mean the past is being set aside. It doesn't mean that 137 years of our Church's history and tradition are going to be ignored. It just means that God is bringing to fulfillment the hopes and dreams that people have always had for Jesus First UMC. When God does a new thing, He builds on the faithfulness of those who have come before so that the Church can fulfill its mission and ministry within the community.

We must affirm our spiritual heritage.

3. WE MUST LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD!

Peter got so excited in the moment that he wanted it to last forever. Like a kid needing Ritalin, Peter said: “Let me build three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” And while he was speaking “a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.’”

One of the biggest mistakes we make in the church is that we spend too much time talking and doing and not enough time listening. We need to listen to God so that we can be guided by the Holy Spirit as we make strategic decisions.

We need to listen in prayer.

We need to listen to His Word. The primary way God speaks to us is through His word, the Bible. And as we read it and seek to apply it to our lives, it becomes a road map for us to follow.

We need to listen to the voice of experience. We need to learn from those pastors and churches who have made similar transitions, because there is wisdom in personal experience. God often speaks to us through the experiences of others.

We need to be guided by the voice of God.

4. WE NEED TO PUT INTO PRACTICE WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE.

Matthew’s version of the Transfiguration says when the cloud was gone, Jesus said to the disciples: “Follow me” and lead them back down the mountain. You know, many times, churches like to pray about things; we like to discuss things; we like to plan

things. We like to have mountaintop experiences with the Lord, but when it comes time for the rubber to hit the road, you can't find the Church. But in the story of the Transfiguration, Jesus didn't allow the disciples to rest. He lead them back down the mountain where the sick needed healing, where the discouraged needed encouragement, and where the lost needed a Savior.

Friends, there is a time for prayer and fasting; there is a time for planning and studying, but Jesus won't leave us there for long. Jesus wants us in the valley where people are hurting. And there may come a time when the best thing we can do is JUST GET ON WITH IT. You see, there are children who need Jesus; there are people within driving distance of our Church that need to hear the Good News; they need a Church family like Jesup First.

We need to begin putting into practice what we know to be true.

The doctor said: *"Sarah, I hate to tell you this, but you're in terrible shape. You've got to do something. You're going to have to change your diet and reduce the stress. So stop working so much. And tell your husband that he's going to have to cook once in a while and he's got to take the kids a couple of days a week so that you can get some rest. Sarah, if you don't make some changes, you're going to be dead within a few months."*

Sarah said: *"Wait a minute, Doc. This would sound better coming from you. Let me call him in here and you tell him."* So she walked out to the lobby and said: *"Honey, the doctor needs to talk with you for a minute."*

So he went in the back and a few minutes later, he came back out. They left the office without saying a word and then, about half way home, she turned to him and said: "*Well, honey, what did the doctor tell you?*" He said: "*It's bad news. You're not going to make it.*"

Now, there may be some folks at Jesup First who believe we're just not going to make it. We're not going to make the financial commitment or the personal commitment of time and resources that are necessary for us to move through this time of transition. But friends, I believe this is a life or death time in the history of our Church. We will either live or die tomorrow based on what we do today. And I know that God's greatest desires for our Church are within our reach, we just need to make the transition from where we are to where God is calling us to be.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN!