

Clouds Happen

Luke 9:28-36, 2/14/10 (Transfiguration)

I was only about 5 years old but can still remember the sensation. My mother had told me that if I lay down and looked up at the clouds I would think the world was tipping over. I wasn't quite sure exactly what she meant but it must be true; after all, she was my mother and mothers know things.

Not too long after that I was out playing in the yard on one of those days when there are cumulous clouds that haven't yet decided to gather into formation to attack the earth with pelting drops.

I lay down on my back by the silo and the barn, looked up and had to quickly close my eyes; the silo was tipping and was about to fall on me. I was fascinated and must have stayed there for some time for the all-seeing eye of mom soon came out to see if I was ok. Over and over I watched when a cloud passed.

Show slides of clouds.

Clouds continue to fascinate me. There are 8 different types of clouds and Chuck Baker has found some examples of different kinds of clouds and will show them to get us all in the frame of mind to deal with Jesus, Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah.

As we viewed these beautiful pictures I didn't see any clouds that resembled the shape of a human but we all have seen examples of such.

Many years ago in my parish in MN we had a retired grain elevator owner who liked to come and do all the lawn mowing at the church. One day I went out to visit with him and thank him for his service; Ervin was known for his colorful speech and exaggerations.

Well, old Erv had a look on his face that told me he had been hoping I would show up. Erv proceeded to tell me that when he was moving the grass the last time and the sun was getting low in the sky and an evening thunder storm was brewing he had seen something very unusual.

Erv had a speech problem at times when he was excited. Words would just escape him.

The cloud formation in the West had been such that he concluded he had seen the figure of Jesus. Cold and skeptical Norwegian that I am, as I listened, he apparently saw doubt written all over my face.

In frustration and without words, he stared at me. Then the words came gushing forth, he took the Lord's name in vain and said, "Blank blank it Rev.; that was Jesus Christ, I know it!"

This close encounter with Jesus had meant a great deal to him and no preacher of little faith was going to rob him of his experience.

But something else had happened as well; he had just engaged in the exercise of alchemy. Alchemy is the transmutation of something common into something special.

Clouds have been a great source of alchemy as long as humans have been looking up and marveling at the unique shapes of these billowy friends of heaven.

Even our figures of speech include clouds: "Every cloud has a silver lining, the cloud has lifted, he has his head in the clouds, and she is on cloud nine". I guess I came to the conclusion that Erv wasn't going to allow me to "Cast a cloud" over his religious experience.

We go back to the idea of alchemy for our lesson today from Luke's gospel. There in the lesson, beginning with v-28, this unusual episode is explained. Jesus goes to a mountain to pray and takes his three closest disciples with him.

While he is praying his face and clothing takes on a strangely bright hue. Then, to top that, two figures who represent the law and prophets (Moses and Elijah) appear talking to Jesus.

All this is happening while Peter and friends are sleep deprived so their reaction is a bit strange; let's set up some tents and capture this. And then the alchemy of the cloud that envelopes them; it is really the presence of God. The usual is transmuted into the very unusual!

Beginning in Genesis, God sets his bow in the cloud as a sign of the covenant. A cloud plays a decisive role in the crossing of the Red Sea. In the wilderness, God leads the Israelites with a cloud by day and fire by night.

The use of the cloud as symbol had its most important impact on history when the prophet Daniel proclaimed that the savior will come “with the clouds of heaven: I saw in the visions of the night, and behold one like the son of man come with clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days.”

In Luke’s version of this amazing happening we see many strange things. Beside what I have already mentioned, out of the cloud comes the voice of God speaking *of* Jesus *to* the three witnesses, Peter, James and John.

God says just 8 words; “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

If God were to appear to you or me along with our 3 closest friends, what would God have to say about us to our friends? God is trying, through Luke’s pen, to convince the three of the relationship of Jesus to God.

God is giving witness in court before the jury of Peter, James and John. God drops the trump card before this three man jury for it is critical that they understand the nature of Jesus.

The three will soon be called upon to lead the cause without the presence of one whose face is so bright and whose clothes appear to have been bleached with the best Clorox has to offer.

But the three are so human and so typical of the followers of Jesus. As it says in the last half of v-36, “And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.”

They weren’t like old Erv; he was not about to be silenced even with his speechlessness. The three, Peter, James, and John, just did not understand! Even with all they had witnessed Jesus do and sitting under his teachings, their response was, “Daaa!”

It was only later, after the grief of the cross, the joy of the resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit they would speak with clarity and confidence.

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Faithfulness is not achieved by freezing a moment in history but by following on in confidence that God is leading to something that is even greater than what may be unexplainable.

It is so easy to get fixated on an experience that we miss God's intent. Christian experience is sometimes real and profound.

It is often not provable or even helpful to use it as a means of evangelism. It is most often meant to be a door into something of growth that changes our outlook on life and renews the wonder of grace.

The cloud of mystery happens when it happens. We have no control over it and when it does happen we best just rest in grace and ask ourselves, **"I wonder what all that meant?"** And then, move on with eyes wide open to new possibilities.

The meaning will come with each intentional step of faith.