

February 15 2015

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalm 50:1-6*

II Kings 2:1-12, p. 328

Mark 9:2-9, p.921

**Sermon**     *Clearing Away the Clouds*

If I learned nothing else from my literature class in schools, at least I learned a very simple truth that most good novels, most good plays, most good movies or short stories somehow have a plot. In addition I learned that every plot have several components. The story for example should begin with some sort of introduction in which we are introduced to the major characters, the work and the setting of the action, the situation or tension to be dealt with eventually in the story. And secondly building upon that introductory material we see the interplay of the characters, the setting and the situation in what literary folks call arising action, a building of tension to the point for the audience and readers can hardly wait to see or to experience the next act in the play or can't stand the delay in turning the pages to see what in the world is going onto happen to these characters that we have come to know so well. Now for Dee that is Downton Abby, I don't know what it is for you. The point at which this rising writing action boils over is called the climax. The third major of part is the plot. This is the crisis point in the story; this is where action has taken on a life of its own. Decisions have to be made or direction has to be taken one way or the other whether the characters like it or not because things are sort of in a fever pitch in the plot. Now once the decisions have been made and actions have been taken it remains for the author to sort of wrap things up, hopefully, in a sensible and reasonable way or sometime not and we are left hanging. The direction of things has been plotted and we as reader or we as audience have but to wait for things to come to their natural conclusion in the story. This is called the *denouement*, a French word that describes the sort of coming together of all things at the end of the story.

Today St Mark describes for us the events surrounding Jesus transfiguration. We are given a rare glimpse, I think, of what in literally terms would be called the climax or crisis point in the story of the faith pilgrimage of Jesus. Up to this point in Jesus' journey of faith everything has been introduction, everything has been rising action, all that follows is in terms of Jesus personal relationship to God in the following action except for a few twists and turns that we are going to see during the course of Lent. Jesus knows now what he must do and how it must be done and in the words of Luke, Chapter 9 sort of gives us an idea where Jesus is in his journey of faith. Luke says, "He set his face to go to Jerusalem."

The mountain top experience of the transfiguration prepared Jesus for the difficult descent into the valley of life as well as the valley of death in the world below. And the same may be said for his disciples who accompanied him, the experience of the transfiguration as I said before energized them but they, also, got a taste of the difficulties which lay ahead. It said the cloud came and overshadowed them and they were afraid. Encompassed by the cloud they could not see Jesus; they could not see each other; they could only hear those words, "This is my son, listen to him." Though Jesus was present in that darkness, they simply, nevertheless, they had to trust that he was there.

Two years ago some of my friends and I drove through South Dakota on a cross country trip. We were driving along the highway, sort of without a care, enjoying each other and the beauty around us when all of a sudden the highways were encompassed with thick black smoke. Smoke so thick we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces, we could barely get the car off the busy highway onto the shoulder. Everybody was terror struck. Nobody knew what to do. Should we stay in the car and get smashed into? Should we try to walk to safety over terrain that we really didn't know anything about? All around us we could hear those breaks screeching. We could hear metal crunching and we could hear glass shattering as cars rammed into each other. We decided that all we could do is to fasten our seat belts and comfort each other and pray. We spent several minutes in terror not knowing what the next thing would bring. Finally the smoke cleared and we were amongst those who escaped unharmed. Later we found out that it turned out to be a train had sparked a grass fire that had engulfed the whole freeway with smoke.

When I think about that incident in my life I think about the fear and utter confusion the disciples must have felt as they entered that cloud on the mountain on that day. Unable to see Jesus, unable to see each other; not knowing what would happen next and all they had were those words, "This is my son, listen to him." How many times during the following days they remembered as they faced the dark clouds of hatred, of opposition, or difference to their mission. Dark clouds that must have made them wonder, did we say what we thought we saw on that mountain? Can I really trust Jesus? Is this indeed the Son of God? And finally the dark clouds of the cross that seemed to shatter every single last hope, leaving them feeling disillusioned, and abandoned, stranded and barely able to cling together as a family. Like the disciples we have all had a glimpse of Jesus' glory. We have all read the stories. We have all heard the words. "This is my son, listen to him." But life is battered against the belief. There are a lot of dark clouds that cause us to question our faith and make us wonder if God is there. They make it hard to hang onto to God's love in the midst of those very, very difficult times.

A collegiate told about a friend that he and his wife had met through the Marriage Encounter Movement, who was encompassed by such a dark cloud. For

them the dark cloud was the death of their child. Even in normal circumstances it is a difficult thing for them to bear, with them especially for they had given up hope of ever having children at all. They adopted when it seemed as parents, they never ever would have their own child but all of a sudden as these things sometimes. Happen after many years, she was expecting a baby. The joy was believable but it didn't last very long she couldn't carry the baby to term. It was born prematurely and its system was underdeveloped. And then came the long days of waiting. Would this baby live? Or would this baby die? And finally the baby passed away and you can imagine the shock. I will never forget the conversation my collegiate had describing the conversation he had with the mother in her time of grief as she was sharing how hard it was dealing with those feelings of loss and how angry she was with God that this had happened to her in these kinds of circumstances. I wish I could tell you that the shadow of the cloud passed from their lives and a miracle occurred and the losses were completely healed and that another baby was on the way but the wound was still there and there was not to be another child in that family. And yet I can also share a miracle of sorts with all of you while they were encompassed in the darkness of the cloud so many people shared their love with them in a way that would not have happened otherwise in any other circumstances. A lot of people learned the meaning of faith, learned the meaning of compassion in the midst of that personal disaster. You know it doesn't seem like much but sometimes all we can do is like what we did in that fire, to cling together and listen for God's promises because the clouds will lift. The memories will remain but the clouds will lift and one day the clouds will be no more and we will see God face to face.

Now of course there are those who interpret life much differently than I interpret life. For them each dark cloud is only more and more evidence that life will only get darker and darker; proof that I should forget about other people and I think only about myself. Katherine ---in her book, *The Miracle of Love* relates that many such people during the course of her life attacked Mother Theresa the Nobel Laureate for her work amongst the poor in India. They said, "Big deal even if you found 200 or 250,000 lepers and homes for 3000 abandoned children that is just a drop in the bucket in the midst of so much human suffering" And Mother Theresa gave her usual characteristically quiet answer, "I do not think the way you think," she said. "I don't add up, I only subtract from the total of those who suffer. It's not the magnitude of our actions that count but the amount of love that we put into actions that truly matter." So we, too, must not look on the dark clouds of life; we must not focus on despair; we must focus on what we can do and how we can do it and maybe that is all that we can do. We can huddle together more closely or hug somebody else or to spend a few moments with somebody or to reach into our pocket and give a couple of dollars. But you know all those small acts add up and

subtract from the despair and darkness around us. It doesn't add to those things. It places us amongst the people in the world who bring hope to others and reminds the world that one day the clouds will leave and the dark attitudes and even the darker situations will lead to the potential being transfigured as Jesus was transfigured from darkness into garments that were whiter than bleached. And together we say Amen.