What to Do When God Breaks Through

First in the 2017 Easter series, “That Same Power.”

# Scriptures: Luke 9:21-36

# Key idea: In breakthrough moments, God draws us to Himself and confirms His work in our lives.

# Intro:

Story of Jack from Adventures of a Clay Pot by Richard N. Ryley p. 24

Sometimes God breaks into our lives in the most amazing ways. He surprises us as he did the disciples at the transfiguration with an unusual and obvious evidence of his presence. Such movements of God’s grace may even be miraculous and unbelievable as in the case of the vision of God given to Ezekiel and the transfiguration of Jesus experienced by Peter, James and John.

Other times, in fact most times, our spiritual experience are more ordinary, more common to human experience, yet we can discern the footprint of God’s touch in many such moments too, as in the cases of Jack and his Mom and Rev. Ryley that I read.

Here is the question that I have for us this morning. What are the lessons that we are to learn from such experiences? The transfiguration of Jesus and the disciples' responses to it teach us about responding to those transcendent moments in our own lives when God breaks through our ordinary routines whether by miraculous events or more ordinary inspirations.

# The Outline of the Moment

Let’s review the events of the transfiguration briefly.

## Jesus was praying with the inner three of the disciples

Peter, James and John were the inner circle among the disciples. They were the leaders. Jesus knew that they were critical to the future of his message. James would be the head of the church just after Pentecost. Peter is the focus of the first part of the book of Acts, the story of the first days of the church. John would write five NT books and have the longest influence on the church. So there is a good reason why Jesus singled out these three.

## His appearance was transfigured

In Exodus, 34:29, the Bible says that Moses’ face shone when he came down from the mountain where he had spent speaking to God. But the transfiguration of Jesus is of a different order. Not only does Jesus’ face shine like the sun, Matthew says (17:2), but his clothes become as bright as lightning. On top of that, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and speak to him about his future “departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”

## Moses and Elijah appear and speak about his departure

### The topic of discussion

The subject of Moses’ and Elijah’s conversation with Jesus was the very topic that Jesus was trying to get his disciples to pay attention to. But they were in denial about it. In Matthew 16, we are told that when Jesus first began to talk about suffering at the hands of the chief priests and eventually being killed and then raised to life, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him (Matthew 16:21-23). Apparently Peter’s rebuke was so strong that Jesus had to come against him equally strongly by saying, “Get behind me, Satan.” The disciples just could not comprehend the kind of ending to Jesus’ ministry that Jesus was describing. It was not their picture of how it would end. Moses and Elijah talking about it as well would help Peter, James and John to accept what Jesus was teaching. The record shows that Jesus talked about that subject again right after the Transfiguration.

### The choice of Moses and Elijah

Why is it that of all the great figures of the OT, Moses and Elijah were the ones to appear? First, perhaps we need to remember that both Moses and Elijah had unusual endings to their earthly lives. Moses went up on the mountain and was not seen again. And they never found him either. Elijah was taken up into heaven on a chariot of fire as Elisha watched. So perhaps they were both uniquely qualified to talk to Jesus about his upcoming departure.

But there is more to it than that, much more. Some commentators have seen allusions to the eras of the law and the prophets, respectively. Moses, the writer of the Pentateuch, stands for the era of the law. Elijah, among the first and perhaps greatest of the prophets might stand for the era of the prophets. Both of these eras, the eras of the OT, were passing away as the timeline of God’s history was about to enter the era of grace, ushered in by Jesus through his death and resurrection.

True, but there is even more than this that is represented by the choice of Moses and Elijah. There are two ruling prophecies which are being fulfilled in Christ which are likely the primary reasons for the choice. The first is a prophecy given through Moses that God would one day send a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18). Israel was looking for that prophet. The New Testament is very clear that Jesus was the one to whom the prophecy referred (Acts 3:19-22). So Moses appeared at the transfiguration to speak to the successor of whom he had prophesied. There was also a prophecy much remembered by the Jews that before the Messiah would come, God would send the prophet Elijah (Mal. 4:4-6). Jesus tried to help the disciples see that John the Baptist was the Elijah who had been promised. But here at the transfiguration, Elijah himself appears, to speak with Jesus, the Messiah who was to come. It is a literal appearance of Elijah. Mark’s version of the transfiguration indicates that on the way down the mountain, the three disciples talked about the prophecy concerning Elijah and Jesus again alluded to John (Mark 9:11 – 13). But that discussion underscores the prophecy being the reason for Elijah’s appearance.

## Peter’s response

Peter’s verbal response to the transfiguration is impetuous. Luke tells us as much when he writes, “He did not know what he was saying” (Luke 9:33). Peter was at a loss for words, but he had to say something. Peter’s reference to booths probably refers to the type of temporary shelters that the Jews created for the feast of Tabernacles. But the deeper question is, “Why did Peter make this suggestion?” At the least, it indicates that Peter was not focusing on the right content. He was not thinking about who Jesus was which is where the heavenly voice was directing his thoughts. He was not thinking about the conversation regarding Jesus “departure” either. He was only thinking about the awesome experience that he had just had and he was probably just hoping to prolong it.

## God’s voice from the cloud

The apostles had heard a voice from heaven affirming Jesus at his baptism too (Matt. 3:17). The purpose of the voice at the transfiguration is simple. It is given to us in the last phrase “Listen to him” (Luke 9:35). Judging from the context, the subject in particular that they were to pay attention about was the upcoming death and resurrection of Jesus.

# Misguided reactions to transcendent moments

This quick review of the event leads us to the next point. What were the unhelpful responses that the disciples made to this miraculous event? What can we learn from their mistakes?

## Fear

First of all, they were very afraid. One can hardly blame them, I suppose. Something was happening which was not in their normal realm of experience. Whenever that happens we can get fearful. But fear is usually not the best response to a time when God breaks through. One time Jesus told the disciples to cross the lake without him. They did so. Then in the night, he came walking up to the boat on the water. They were afraid. Jesus’ words to them were:

“Take courage, It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Matt. 14:27)

Both the Christmas and the Easter narratives are filled with “Do not be afraid.” Whenever we are sure it is the Lord, we do not need to be afraid. Fear is something that comes so easily to us.

Fear will keep us from getting the message that God desires us to hear.

I have known people who were afraid lest anything unusual happen in a service. Someone actually left our church once because I departed from the bulletin order. I suspect in 1871 when history records that people were fainting away in these pews under the influence of the Spirit, that some people were upset by the unusual events. The disciples were afraid at the transfiguration. They were afraid when Jesus came to them walking on the water. Friends, we do not need to be afraid when the Spirit of God is moving. It is a good thing. It might push us out of our comfort zones but it is not something to be afraid of.

## Institutionalize

A second misguided response is to try to hold the pattern still – to stay in the moment or to recreate it. This is represented by Pete’s impetuous though to build three booths to dwell in. Let’s just dwell here. This is good, we need more of it. But God does not send us spiritual high points so we can sit and soak like someone in a hot tub. He blesses us with inspiration and renewal in order that we can be prepared for the tasks and challenges to which he will send us.

## Forget quickly

The disciples were not to forget this moment. The purpose of the Transfiguration was to instruct and prepare the leading disciples for the future. It was to build their faith. Yet on the way down the mountain, when the boy suffering from seizures was brought to him, they did not have faith to help him. Jesus had to help heal him in person. Their faith had been strengthened but they forgot too quickly.

# Positive responses to transcendent moments

## Remember they can happen

In our day of skepticism concerning the supernatural, it is good to be reminded that God still works in ways that are beyond human understanding. Stories such as Jack’s remind us of this. Stories such as the transfiguration help us to envision what might be behind Paul’s benediction in Ephesians.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Eph. 3:20-21

## It is a good thing

Peter was right about one thing. It is a good thing when God breaks into our lives, orchestrating special moments great or small. I have heard testimonies of all different kinds of ways that God has broken through the everyday humdrum to bring hope, inspiration and spiritual renewal in people’s lives. It is awesome to hear the testimonies.

Here is an example of the most common way that God breaks through to us, through his Word. “Isaiah 43” Adventures of a Clay Pot p. 50

## Confirm your faith

In the first story that I read, the faith of three people was affirmed by the confirmation of divine activity that God sent via a mother’s prayers. At the transfiguration, it is clear from the subject of Moses’ and Elijah’s conversation and from the pronouncement of God the Father that one key purpose of the transfiguration was to confirm the disciple’s faith in Jesus and in his words. A time of great disappointment and testing was coming. These three leaders among the apostles needed a reassurance that would carry them through.

God sends us special moments to confirm our faith and help us when things are more difficult. Just as the children of Israel looked back to God’s miraculous activity at the time of Exodus and expected him to intervene again; just as the Psalmist remembered his times of worship in the sanctuary and expected to meet with God again (Ps. 63:2); so we remember the times when God breaks through into our lives and they become reminders for us that God is at work in our lives today.

## Fix your thoughts on Jesus

The message of the Father is still relevant today.

“A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” (Luke 9:35)

Spiritual experience is given to point us to the Savior. Our tendency is to focus on the experience, the feeling, rather than the message. But God gives such blessings in order to point us to Himself and to his Son, Jesus. Whenever our focus becomes simply on experience, we need to remember the message of the transfiguration. “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

Matthew tells us that the disciples were terrified by the voice and ducked down in fear, but then he comments, “When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus” (Matthew 17:6). To me this comment always reinforced the message – Fix your thoughts on Jesus! Listen and heed his words!

Today we seek inspiration. Concerts use loud music, dynamic lighting to produce excitement. Churches are borrowing the trend. But ultimately whatever inspiration we find is meant to help us focus our thoughts on Jesus. The answers are not in the experience, however warm and fuzzy it might be. The answers are in the one who came as the “way the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

## Be encouraged in our worship and our prayers

Another lesson that comes to mind is this. I am thinking about the fact that the moments when God breaks up our spiritual routine seem to most often happen either when we are in worship or when we are in prayer. Now they can happen at other times. But worship and prayer are the most common. This ought to encourage both our gathering for worship and our private prayers. One never knows when God will choose that service, or that time of devotion for a special moment.

Do you wonder why God never seems to speak to you? Does God seem remote? There can be many answers to those questions. But if that is our experience, we can begin by asking, “Am I spending time with Him or am I pretty much leaving it to God to catch me on the run?” He could do that, of course, but the Bible tells us that he is looking for those who are seeking, who are intentionally drawing nearer to Him (Prov. 8:17; Matt. 7:7, 8).

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jer 29:13

## Remember God's message to you

When God does get our attention with a spiritual high moment, he has a message for us. But we tend to forget so quickly. His point in giving us the gracious experience was not just to send us a warm fuzzy, but so that we might remember the message. We tend to focus on the experience and forget the Giver and the message.

Peter and John did remember the message. Both of them referred to the inspiration of this moment in their later writings. It may be one thing John is referring to at the beginning of his gospel when he says.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Peter is more explicit in discussing the transfiguration in his first letter to the churches.

We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2 Peter 1:16-19

The first part of God’s message to us in his break-through inspirations is to reassure is that God is there for us. “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5) is his promise.

# Conclusion

Story “The Fog” p. 5 Adventures of a Clay Pot

If God can send a transfiguration to instruct and reassure his disciples before the crucifixion of their Master, if God can clear the fog in answer to Rev. Ryley’s desperate prayer, then he can help you and me in whatever situation we face.