

TITLE: "Never Forget in the Dark What You Learned in the Light"

TEXT: Mark 9:2-29 (NT pp.44-45)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, [Jesus] ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [Jesus] said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. [Jesus] asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." [Jesus] answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to [Jesus].

When the spirit saw [Jesus], immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! —All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When [Jesus] had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

The text reads: “²...Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.”

Peter, John and his brother James were the disciples closest to Jesus, and the Lord spent time alone with them and he showed them things that he showed no one else. Jesus wants to spend time alone with you. ...Talk to Jesus. ...Listen to Jesus. If you do, the Lord will guide you, and show you some amazing things, and you will also find the joy that inspired Austin Miles to write these words:

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.

And He walks with me, and he talks with me,
And He tells me I am his own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.

GOING ON... “And [Jesus] was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

What were Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus about? ...I think they told Jesus what it was like to die and enter into the joy and glory they were experiencing. Jesus knew he was going to be crucified, and God sent Elijah and Moses to help Jesus prepare for that horrible ordeal.

It was also a preparation for Peter, James and John because it showed them, clearly, the joy that AWAITED Jesus after HE died. It also showed them, clearly, the joy THEY would experience after they died.

God always prepares us for what we have to face in life if we will spend time with him, listen to what God has to say, and look for what Jesus has to show us.

GOING ON... “⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.”

There will be times when you are scared, REALLY scared, for yourself or for someone you love. The text us that Peter, James and John were terrified. Being scared is part of

life. If nothing else, every person is afraid to die. When I say this, there are usually people who argue. Some say they are not afraid to die. All I can say is that the fear of death is instinctive. (People sometimes ask, "What about people who commit suicide?" ...It's not that they do not fear death. They do. It's just that they fear living, for some reason, more than they fear death.)

The text says that Peter did not know what to do. There will be times when you are confused and simply do not KNOW what to do. Like a squirrel dithering in the road as a car approaches, sometimes you just don't know which way to go.

There will be times when you come up with some harebrained scheme that you think will relieve the tension of a situation as Peter did on the mountain. I can see Peter explaining to one of his friends later, "You know, in HINDSight, building 3 dwellings looks pretty stupid, but it seemed like a good idea at the time."

Been there, done that. During my college years, a friend and I spent a summer painting dorm rooms. That summer our college also hired a new head of security. He was a stickler for rules, was totally inflexible and has absolutely NO sense of humor. I felt it was my duty to loosen him a bit.

He used to burst through the door to the cafeteria each lunch time and then stand there, arms folded, glaring at each person there in turn. One day I stationed a friend near the building entrance and when he told me this guy was coming, I painted the crash bar of the door and went in.

I PICTURED him pushing with his hands and getting wet paint on his hands only. I DIDN'T picture him hitting the bar with his mid-section. The sight of his expression as he examined his hands and pressed uniform covered with beige paint, is still one of my cherished memories, but it was NOT pretty.

When he asked who responsible for this OUTrage, I stood, saluted and said, "I am, sir!"

He said, "If I can't get this paint out, you'll pay for a new uniform!" And on that note he made his ignominious exit.

Whether you are scared, confused or simply acting like an idiot, there is one thing, and ONLY one thing, you need to remember. God saying to you: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." If you listen to Jesus, Jesus will CALM your fears; Jesus will sort out your confusion; and Jesus will keep you from doing foolish and harmful things. That is if, IF, you listen to Jesus.

One of the stanzas I love in Charles Wesley's hymn, "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing", goes:

Je-sus the name that charms our fears,

That bids our sorrows cease,
 'Tis music in the sinners ears,
 'Tis life and health and peace."

"⁹As [Jesus, Peter, James and John] were coming down the mountain, [Jesus] ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹Then they asked [Jesus], 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' ¹²[Jesus] said to them, 'Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? ¹³But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.'"

The Scribes of that day taught that that Elijah was to appear BEFORE the Messiah came. This was based on the Scripture from Malachi 4:5&6: "⁵Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ⁶He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents...." Because Elijah hadn't come, the scribes were saying, Jesus could NOT be the Messiah. After they saw Jesus transfigured, Peter James and John KNEW that Jesus WAS the Messiah, but they wanted Jesus to explain about Elijah. So Jesus told them that John the Baptist was the Elijah Malachi was talking about and that John the Baptist HAD prepared the way for Jesus to come.

Now there is a major transition in the text. Jesus and the three disciples closest to him, had just experienced this wonderful spiritual revelation on the mountain and as they came down, they were faced with what? A PROBLEM. That is the way life is. We get a SPIRITUAL insight, we feel close to God, we are uplifted in a church service, we have a long time prayer answered and, all of a sudden, there is a NEW problem that has to be dealt with and our spiritual bubble pops like a soap bubble.

THAT is the way life IS. Spirituality is not an end in itself. There are people who are SO spiritually oriented that they are no earthly good. There are people so earthly-oriented they are no spiritual good. Jesus was the PERFECT combination of the two. Jesus had wonderful times of prayer with his Father, he had times like the Mount of Transfiguration, he had times when he taught eternal truth. But there were MANY times when he actually DID things like HEAL people, FEED people, RAISE people from the dead and GIVE people guidance.

We TOO need to have a combination of the earthly and the heavenly, the practical and the spiritual. Jesus describes these two aspects of Christian life as KNOWING and DOING. We need to KNOW Jesus personally and we need to DO what Jesus tells us to do. In Matthew 7, Jesus says this about knowing and doing:

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ ²³Then I will declare to them, ‘I never KNEW you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

You see, DOING good things without KNOWING Jesus is not going to get you into heaven. You HAVE to have a personal RELATIONSHIP with Jesus.

Jesus then goes on to say...

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and ACTS on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not ACT on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

When you KNOW Jesus Christ, your worries are over. When you KNOW Jesus, you KNOW that God loves you, you KNOW you will be like Moses and Elijah after you die and you KNOW you will be WITH Moses and Elijah and Jesus forever. And, because you know how much God loves you, you will want to DO what God wants you to DO.

When you know Jesus, you WILL have times of light as the disciples had in the text, times when you feel very close to God, times of wonderful worship, times when prayers are answered just as you hoped. But you will also have times of darkness, as the disciples did in the text, times of being scared and confused and foolish.

This morning’s lesson is: Never forget in darkness what you learned in the light.

THAT is what this next part is about and you will recall that the disciples had tried to cast out the demon from the boy, but could not. Then...

²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” ²⁶After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. ²⁸When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Prayer is NOT magic. Prayer, TRUE prayer, is getting in line with what God is doing. Jesus was able to cast out that particular evil spirit because he had prayed and God had told him exactly and precisely how and when it was to be done.

And this is EXACTLY what God SAID to Peter, James and John in the LIGHT of the Mount of Transfiguration: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” In each and every moment of light you have, this is the one thing you will hear from God over and over again: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Then never forget in the darkness what you learned in the light. When you are scared, when you are confused, when you find yourself considering or doing something foolish, LISTEN to Jesus and Jesus will tell you what to do. If the other disciples who had failed to cast out the boy’s demon had listened to God in prayer, as Jesus had, they WOULD have been able to cast out the demon. And if you KNOW, and if you LISTEN to Jesus, you will be AMAZED at what the Lord will use you to DO.

Conclusion – God’s love note

When you listen to Jesus, God’s beloved Son, you will also be told one thing, over and over again. That one thing is Jesus saying, “I love you and you ARE my own.” ...Thelma Ganyon lives in Grandy, North Carolina. She recently wrote this for *Guideposts Magazine* (2/10):

I have a thing about hearts, believing there is a special reason for the shape. I’ve collected a lot of them. Some are store-bought—a heart-shaped muffin pan, shelves inlaid with little hearts, other knick knacks. The ones I’m really crazy about, though, are the hearts people give me that they happen to stumble upon. My kids bring me heart-shaped rocks, potatoes, leaves, shells, even a heart-shaped waffle. Every time I see hearts, I believe they’re showing God’s love to me.

That’s what I needed a lot more of right now. We had just moved to North Carolina from Maryland with our two youngest children, and I was looking forward to a more relaxing lifestyle in our beautiful new home by the beach. But things weren’t going as planned. My husband, Richard, couldn’t find welding work right away. Instead of relaxing, my part-time job as a receptionist had become full-time. And the kids were having problems adjusting to their new school.

One chilly afternoon I was outside with Richard, watching him chop wood for our fireplace. "Things just don't feel right here yet," I fussed. Richard lifted the ax above his head and came down on the tree limb with a heavy blow. *He's probably sick of my complaining.* I knew I was.

Richard stopped his chopping and came over. "Honey, come here," he said. *Now what's wrong?* I wondered, trudging over. He handed me the piece of wood he had been chopping. I turned it around in my hands. My heart stopped. "Look," he said, pointing. Inside the limb, the cut revealed a hole [in the shape of a perfect heart].

It wasn't long before Richard found work, the kids learned to love their new school and I was finally able to relax. Whenever I think of complaining now, I look at the slice of wood Richard saved for me. A reminder that God always cares...a heart-shaped hole he placed inside a tree branch. What a place to hide a love note!

In the light, when things are going well, God will always tell you to listen to his beloved Son. If you do, Jesus will always tell you "I love you and you ARE my own. Then, in the dark, when things are not going well, never forget what you learned in the light.

Amen.