

LAST AFTER EPIPHANY - TRANSFIGURATION

Mark 9:2-9

We human beings are a strange mixture of belief and doubt. We say we believe something, but there is always doubt present. It is possibly a part of being human. We are always questioning what we believe to be the truth.

But thank God we still venture to believe, despite our doubts. Even though we can't see God, most of us still believe that God exists. Despite all the evil in the world, we still believe that God is in control, and that God is good. If we do not admit that we have doubts, then we are fooling ourselves.

Jesus' disciples were no different. They believed and yet they doubted also. One day Jesus asked them who people were saying He was. They said, "Some say Elijah or John the Baptist come back." Then Jesus said, "Who do you say I am?" And Peter said, "You are the Messiah." He believed in Jesus and was the first disciples to say so out loud.

But, then Jesus started saying that He must go to Jerusalem to be rejected and killed. Peter didn't like the sound of this. He probably began to doubt not only Jesus' divinity, but His sanity as well. Mark says that Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him and told Him he was wrong. If Peter believed without a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, he would have accepted whatever Jesus said as the Gospel truth. But he questioned what Jesus told him and doubted.

This incident demonstrates that Peter, the chief apostle, was a

mixture of belief and doubt. Don't misunderstand, Peter honestly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but at the same time he questioned the truth of Jesus' teaching when it didn't make perfect sense to him.

Then, one day, Jesus took three of the disciples: Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. At the top something happened. Jesus was transfigured. His clothes became an unearthly white and his face glowed. Moses and Elijah were standing there with Him as a testimony to Jesus' holiness. Then a voice came from heaven and said, "This is my Beloved Son, do as He says." This happened to confirm their faith. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but at the same time they probably wondered if He was not mistaken about going to Jerusalem to die. But despite their doubt they followed Jesus to the mountain and God showed them that Jesus was the Messiah, and their faith was strengthened as a result.

Like the disciples, we are a mixture of belief and doubt. If we are honest with ourselves we can all pray: "Lord I believe. Help my unbelief." That is the prayer of a true disciple. Anything less is a failure to be honest with ourselves and with God.

We all have doubts, and one of the main areas of doubt is that Jesus actually is the Son of God. Like Peter, people say Jesus is the Messiah, but they doubt at the same time. Many people say they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they have never committed their lives to Him. They accept the Biblical teaching that Jesus is God's Son, but are unwilling to live their lives based on that. Many who say they believe Jesus is the Son of God are unwilling to set aside the time to worship Him on a regular basis, or to give some time to Him in prayer or service. All of us have some level of doubt no matter how deep our faith in Christ is.

That Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, is the cornerstone of our faith. If He was only a great moral teacher, and not the only begotten Son of God, then His teachings are no more important than any other's. If He was not God's Son then He could not have died for our sins, and we would have to rely on our own moral ability and good works to save ourselves. And we know no one is saved by works. Perhaps people doubt Jesus' divinity because it is so central to our faith.

We all have doubts. However when we have doubts, we just follow Jesus anyway. There are some people who believe they should just sit still until they get it all figured out. They say they will start going to church after they are finished reading the Bible and understand it. Or they won't make a commitment to Christ until they are free of all doubts. It'll never happen!

That's not the way Jesus works. When Jesus called Peter and the others, He didn't say come and I will explain everything to you then we will minister. He said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Christians learn on their feet while they walk. Jesus believes in on-the-job training. We must follow to learn and grow. If we try to learn it all then follow, we will never learn a thing. We should step out in faith, especially when we doubt, because it is only when we step out in faith that our faith is verified and our doubts are quieted.

Step out in faith like Peter, James and John. They doubted, yet they followed Jesus up that mountain and their faith was confirmed and strengthened. In the same way we have to follow Jesus up the mountain. Even though it seems an uphill struggle, and our doubts nag at us, we must continue to step out in faith. When we do, we will see for ourselves that Jesus is the Beloved Son of God, the Messiah, and we can listen to Him.

AMEN.