

I am really enjoying the process of following Luke sequentially. It helps make so much more sense of the gospel. I hope you all are appreciating it, as well. Unfortunately, in order to make it fit the church season, we have to skip some parts. So today we have moved from chapter 7 last week, to chapter 9 this week. There's a lot that has happened in the story Luke is constructing. In our bible study this past Thursday, Pat Baker connected some of these pieces for us.

Much of it has to do with understanding who Jesus is.

Immediately, following our story of Jesus raising to life the only son of a widow, disciples of John the Baptizer comes to Jesus--on John's behest, asking, "Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for someone else?" The phrase "the one who is coming" links directly back to Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH." (A phrase we will hear again on Palm Sunday.) So, John wants to know, "Are you the one coming." Jesus doesn't answer John directly. He just instructs John's disciples to go back to John and tell him what Jesus is doing - namely what Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, back in Nazareth. It seems to keep coming back to that scroll of Isaiah!

Then (Jesus) replied to John's disciples, "Go, report to John what you have seen and heard. Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled now walk. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. And good news is preached to the poor.

We're not quite sure what John was expecting of Jesus, but it seems that what Jesus is doing didn't quite fit John's expectation. If there was a "mold" of what the anointed one--the Messiah--was supposed to be, apparently Jesus broke it. Or, at least, didn't fit it.

Church, please understand, this is important work, discerning who Jesus is! I know for sure, right now in our time, people who call themselves Christians do not agree on who, or how, Jesus was the Christ. It is vital that we pay attention to these stories, so that we can--for ourselves!--discern who Jesus was--who Jesus was meant to be!

After responding to John's messengers, Jesus went on to give object lessons in compassion and forgiveness, to heal, to teach, to cast out demons, and calm storms - he equipped his disciples with all they would need to do his work, and he fed a large crowd with food and wisdom -- all of that in chapter and a half. Who is Jesus?!?

Right before our reading today, Jesus polls his disciples on that very question:

"Who do the crowds say that I am?"

19 They answered, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others that one of the ancient prophets has come back to life."

**I find this answer to be fascinating...I've never given it a whole lot of thought - just took it for the response it is. The disciples can only think of Jesus within paradigms they know, and with**

**which they are familiar. It seems that Jesus “being Jesus” didn’t quite make him the Messiah they expected. I’ll get back to that point in a moment. Let’s continue with Jesus’ questions for his disciples.**

20 He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”  
Peter answered, “The Christ sent from God.”

**This is one of those “good” moments for Peter - when he was spiritually grounded. In this moment he can see the divine embedded in the human. Peter’s response is KEY to him becoming Jesus’ lead disciple.**

21 Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

**Wait...whoa...why? I think, “who the Christ is” was such a big question, with such high stakes, that people needed to work it out for themselves - they couldn’t just be told - “Jesus is the Messiah” without it causing shockwaves. At the conclusion of the next 40 days or so, we will see the variety of responses presented to Jesus and his disciples regarding him as Messiah - right? Jesus knew:**

22 Jesus said, “The Human One {*New Human Being*} must suffer many things and be rejected—by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts—and be killed and be raised on the third day.”

**After all this, we don’t have ANY response from the disciples. They are in full processing mode...**

We finally arrive at our given text for today. And as we do, keep in mind the question we have been asking, “who is Jesus?”

### Let's have Elliot read it: Luke 9:28-45

Again, a LOT of symbolic imagery in the story of the Transfiguration. There are many KEY words and phrases that serve as Easter Eggs that, when understood, open the hearer to a deeper understanding for just how closely Jesus is tied to

YHWH : *(the notes below come from the Jewish New Testament, ed Amy Jill Levine.)*

*Eight days*, Jewish thought associates eight days with circumcision - perhaps here anticipating Jesus' resurrection on the "first day after the old week." This event signifies the dying of an old life, and ushering in a fresh, new understanding for,

*Peter and John and James*: the inner circle (points back to fishing)  
*Mountain*, place where Moses (Ex 34) and Elijah (1 Kings 19) received revelation with YHWH.

*To pray*, in Luke, Jesus prays ALOT. And when he does, amazing things happen. Looking in ch. 3, after he is baptized, Jesus prays, and it is at THAT point that the heavens open up and the Spirit descends upon him. AGAIN, in THIS text it is while Jesus is praying that the transformation happens. Luke emphasizes how praying opens up oneness with God.  
*Face*, (after Moses' encounter with God on the mountaintop, his face shines brightly)

*Dazzling*, suggests mystical experience

*Moses and Elijah*, likely representing Israel's preeminent prophets, each of whom faced rejection. Also signifies the Torah" (Pentateuch) and "Nevi'im" (Prophets) being unified in Jesus.

*Glory*, see 2.9n.

*Departure* (Gk "exodus," "road out"), ties to Moses, referring to Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

*Sleep*, anticipating 22.45.

*Cloud*, indicating the divine presence

*Voice*,

*Chosen*, cf. Isa 42.1 "Here is my Servant, whom I uphold / my chosen one, in whom I delight"

*Listen to him*, Deut 18.15 "YHWH, your God, will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among your own people; to that prophet you must listen."

*Jesus was found alone*, If there was any question about whether or not Jesus was the Christ, this event answered it - no questions remaining. **He is the one.**

And this core group of disciples is once again struck silent. However, they are now FULLY awake to who Jesus is, and those of us who have been following along in Luke's gospel are invited to decide for ourselves.

A new day has dawned....

...No, literally, it is a new day when they descend down the mountain. And I don't know if the scene that awaits us is meant to be comedy, or to remind us that sorry Peter, you can't build a hut on a "mountaintop experience." Life eventually takes us back to the day-to-day struggles. They arrive to chaos, as a man has asked the remaining disciples to cure **his only son(!)** from a demon possession. (Remember Jesus equipped them with all they needed to perform healings.) BUt the disciples couldn't do it.

Jesus shouts out his frustration about a faithless and perverse (I like, obstinate or obstructive) people -- this harkens back to Moses' feelings about the people's behavior in the wilderness. Whether he's talking about the incapable disciples or the people in general isn't clear. But, he casts the demon out of the boy, restoring him to his father.

While people are still gasping in amazement at the power of God revealed through Jesus, he tells the disciples again how he will be betrayed into human hands. But they couldn't comprehend the message. Just as Peter had a GREAT moment when he confessed Jesus as the Christ sent from God, the disciples are having a faithless moment when the whole picture just isn't clear. Isn't that true to our experience?!?

The last thing I want to say about this part of the story, is that after two more object lessons, Luke begins to wrap this chapter up by saying, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up (if the use of the word exodus in the previous story evoked Moses, the use of "taken up" evokes Elijah who ended his time on earth by being swept away by a chariot of fire {2 Kings 2}), Jesus set his face to

go to Jerusalem. This is one final echo from Isaiah's song of the suffering servant in 50:7-8:

Exalted YHWH helps me;  
therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;  
(the One) who vindicates me is near.

This is where we connect with the story in the church calendar. With this coming Wednesday being Ash Wednesday, we are on the threshold of Lent. Through the gift of this season we are Jesus' companions, setting our faces toward Jerusalem, and all that awaits him there on the journey.

And here is where I want to return to one of my take-aways upon hearing these stories again. I was caught up in hearing the disciples' responses to Jesus' question "Who do people say that I am?" be a list of "other" people -- John, Elijah, other prophets...

When John sends his followers to Jesus with that question, Jesus gives an "answer" to their John's by telling him what he has been doing in the name of YHWH. **Jesus is being the Christ by being himself, embracing all the covenant-making God had made up to that point, actually taking seriously the task of setting the oppressed free, and calling on people to wake up from the divine within them and do the same.**

Rhetorical question here: remind me who Jesus charged with the responsibility of continuing that work after his earthly work was done?

## The Disciples.

Last week, I referred to church consultant Tod Bolsinger - he's the one who helped the presbytery think about the natural reaction for folks who are afraid of too much change. Bolsinger also lifted up for us an idea first posited by theologian Dallas Willard. And I need you all to listen up - this is KEY:

**“Discipleship,” Willard contended, “is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if Jesus were you.”** (repeat)

A wonderful story is told of Zusha, the great Chassidic (Jewish) master, who lay crying on his deathbed. His students asked him, "Rebbe, why are you so sad? After all the mitzvahs and good deeds you have done, you will surely get a great reward in heaven!"

"I'm afraid!" said Zusha. "Because when I get to heaven, I know God's not going to ask me 'Why weren't you more like Moses?' or 'Why weren't you more like King David?' But I'm afraid that God will ask 'Zusha, why weren't you more like Zusha?' And then what will I say?!"

At that moment, Rabbi Zusha woke up his apprentices. They were to *learn* from Moses, to *learn* from David. On the mountain Peter, James and John came to understand, they were to also *learn* from Elijah. Now, we understand that we *learn* from Jesus, but we have to apply those learnings in the world by being who we are.

And we will have moments...shining moments...as did Jesus when we do so.  
And we will have moments...dull moments...as did the disciples who couldn't  
heal.

But all of them, and all of us, have been claimed by the same God whose voice  
spoke to Jesus by the water, and again on the mountain, and through the  
actions of Jesus spoke to all whom he blessed by saying,

This is my child, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

You are my child, my chosen, in whom I am well pleased.

Yes, you. You are forever beloved by God. You are forever called by God to  
share that love in the world. If you haven't yet received that message within  
the fabric of your bones, I invite you to allow the stories we read together  
throughout the season of Lent to be your companions, your friends, who help  
you wake up to sacred in you that allows you to confidently ask,

***What is mine to do?***

And, with the companionship of your unique community, claim the courage to  
do it.

By the grace of God - amen.