

VISION OF FUTURE

2 Kings 2: 1-12

Mark 9: 2-9

Peter, James and John witnessed the transformation of Jesus into all his glory. They watched in great fear as he spoke with Moses and Elijah. Peter wanted to memorialize the event by building booths. It would have been a futile attempt to retain the glory of the mountaintop experience. The transfiguration, the mountaintop experience could only be for a brief period of time. If it had been any longer it would have ill-prepared them for the future troubles the lay ahead for Jesus and his disciples. But they also needed something that would not only carry them through, but would be something that Peter, James, and John could look back and remember, then understand.

This mountaintop experience compares to the baptism of Jesus and the dove that descended upon him saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The same words were used on the mountaintop with one important addition. The voice from the cloud added the command, "Listen to Him!"

This introduced a new section of the Gospel of Mark. It is a section that carried the theme of instructing the disciples in the way of discipleship and being part of the Kingdom of God. One can observe that Jesus and his disciples were heading toward Jerusalem, toward his arrest, death and resurrection. The prediction of such was mentioned a few verses earlier and would be mentioned again at least two more times.

Some of the things that Jesus taught the disciples were:

1. Jesus taught them about leadership; if you want to be a leader then serve others.
2. He taught them that anyone who is proclaiming Jesus as the Christ should not be stopped for doing so.
3. He taught them that love was the main motivator: love of God, love of neighbor.
4. He taught them to leave vengeance alone, leave it in God's hands.

Jesus and his disciples were headed for very hard times. Jesus was first with his arrest and crucifixion. The disciples later would face persecution and execution. They needed a vision of the future, something to carry them through the rough times.

We also need a vision of the future. Since we live after the death and resurrection of Jesus, our vision of the future is also one of glory, one of a Christ who has ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God. It is a wonderful future that is proclaimed by our Christian faith. And it is a future in which we trust shall come to pass.

Now, there are times when we, as individuals and as a congregation, face what seems to be a bleak or dismal future. Indeed there are Christians in some parts of the world that face hardship, persecution, and even death because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we do not yet face persecution, but we face other hardships that need a faith that can sustain them during hardship.

1. Someone is dying from cancer.
2. Someone is facing a painful divorce.
3. Perhaps someone grieves the death of a loved one.

When we grieve and hurt, it is difficult to retain the Christian vision of the future. It is hard to grieve with hope and vision, but that is exactly what we are called to do!

Congregations are similar. Sometimes they face rough times. Sometimes it seems as if the future is bleak. At these times it is very easy to lose the vision of Christ and become discouraged. That is why we always need to have the vision of God's future before us.

Again, our vision is based upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is now alive and shall remain so forever. Again, our future is not based upon ourselves, our strength alone, but upon the gifts that the Lord has given us to be the church in Petersburg and beyond. These are gifts of the Holy Spirit that we are given to build up the church and to minister in the name of Jesus Christ. It is a vision that can sustain us through hard times and through good times. It is a vision that will keep us focused upon the work Christ has called us to do, rather than upon our worries and anxieties.

Isn't it wonderful to know what our outcome will be? Like Peter, James, and John we have seen the vision. We have been to the mountaintop and the vision is one of God who is the God of life and redemption. Yes, we will die in these mortal bodies. No, that is NOT the end of our lives. The believers who die in Christ shall live with him in the new heaven and the new earth.

Today we baptize Caleb Martin Gill. Baptism is also an expression of our vision and faith in God. Caleb won't really know, or understand what this is all about for a while. But we know. We are expressing that the vision of Christ is also for Caleb to be part of God's future. We are expressing the vision that his and our future belongs to God and God alone!

That is why it is so important for Jason, Heather and the rest of Caleb's family to vow to raise Caleb in the Christian faith and the love of Jesus Christ. He will learn the love and grace of God, not only from his family, but also from us and how we relate to him as another beloved child of God. Our vow as a congregation is clear. We pledge to support Caleb's parents and to help them to nurture Caleb in the love and grace of Jesus Christ. It reminds us that we have pledged that for all children of God; we adults are included! Our vision is the love and nurture of Christ; what a wonderful vision for us to have as we seek God's will as a congregation of Christ in a world that seems so full of hostility and loneliness. Amen.

The Rev. Daniel E. Hale, D. Min.