

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Transfiguration Sunday]  
February 14, 2021  
Rev. YoungMin Kim

Do You Know What You Are Asking?  
Mark 9:2-9

(1)

Moses was once an adopted prince of the most powerful county at the time—Egypt—but became a wanderer in the wilderness. He spent about 40 years without any specific life purpose. One day, God called him and gave him a great mission: to deliver God’s people from the hand of Egyptian oppression and to lead them to the Promised Land—the Land of Canaan. After the exodus, Moses and all the Israelites arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. God called Moses to come up to the mount, and a pillar of cloud came down and covered Moses. There, God revealed Himself to Moses and gave Laws: the 10 Commandments.

Elijah was a prophet in the Kingdom of Israel. Under the rule of King Ahab—who allowed the worship of Baal in the kingdom, established temples of Baal in its capital city of Samaria, erected wooden statues of Asherah, and allowed 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to stay there—Elijah confronted the 450 prophets of Baal, which is well-known as 1 vs. 450 on Mount Carmel, figuring out who was real between God and Baal before all of the Israelites. You know the result: Elijah proved that God is the True One. But right after the event, Elijah had his life threatened by Baal prophets, so he escaped to Mount Sinai. There, God revealed Himself to Elijah and gave him comfort, encouragement, and a new mission.

Moses who was a powerful leader, and Elijah who was a powerful prophet appeared to Jesus on Mount Tabor at the transfiguration event.

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According to the Lectionary schedule, we read the Gospel of Mark 9:2-9 commemorating Jesus transfiguring Himself on Mount Tabor. It is located in lower Galilee at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, about 11 miles west of the Sea of Galilee, and it is about 1,886 feet above sea level. Even though Scripture does not specify the name of the mount—simply saying “a high mountain” (v. 2), according to tradition, Jesus transfigured Himself on the mount that is now called Mount Tabor.

Let us examine today’s passage. Jesus brought His three disciples—Peter, James, and John—to the mount. There, Jesus was transfigured before them. His transfigured appearance is described like this: “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (v. 3). But what is even stranger is that Moses and Elijah appeared before them and talked with Jesus. Here are my two questions. One is, “Why Moses and Elijah among countless prophets in ancient Israel?” And the other is, “What did they talk about with Jesus?” Because the answers are not written in the Gospels, we need to use our rational imagination.

As I mentioned in the beginning, Moses and Elijah had common features. God revealed Himself to them on Mount Sinai, called them a mediator between God and His people—one delivered God’s commandments and laws, and the other performed as God’s true prophet. Thus, Moses represented the laws and Elijah the prophets. When Jesus taught the two greatest commandments—Love the Lord your God with all your hearts, soul, mind, and love your neighbor as yourself—He ended His teaching with this: “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40). In other words, the two great pillars of Jews were the Law and the Prophets. And Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, representing the

Prophets, stood next to Jesus. That is to say, the appearance of Moses and Elijah (or the Law and the Prophet) verified who Jesus was.

And thus, we can assume that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah might have talked with each other about His upcoming death for the salvation of the world and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth just like the ancient Israelites were saved and led to the Promised Land.

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Thus, the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor was a turning point of Jesus's teaching. Before the transfiguration, Jesus focused on teaching the fact that He is the Son of God, the Messiah<sup>1</sup>. But after the transfiguration, He focused on what the Son of God, the Messiah, should do. After all, He entered Jerusalem after a few days coming down from the mount, and a few days later, He was crucified on the cross as the Son of God, the Messiah.

However, even His disciples did not realize the meaning of His transfiguration. Jesus taught the way of the cross with His persecution and death three times, but Peter wanted to build three shelters—for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—on the mount. James and John personally asked Jesus about giving them His right and left seats in His kingdom. And the rest of the disciples became indignant with the two brothers after they heard of this. They still believed that their Teacher would conquer the oppression of Rome and establish a new kingdom. That's why Jesus kept saying, "You do not know what you are asking" (Mark 10:38). As a result, they scattered without hope when they saw Jesus being crucified on the cross.

How about people in Jerusalem? They welcomed Jesus, spreading their cloaks and palm branches on the road saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven" (Matthew 21:9). Based on what He had done, they believed Jesus must be the Messiah who would save them from the oppression. They also did not know who the Christ, the Messiah really was. Jesus might have said in His mind, 'You do not know what you are asking.' As a result, they crucified Him on the cross with anger and violence.

What do we ask God the Father (our Creator), the Son (our Savior), or the Holy Spirit (our Sustainer)? Do we know exactly what we are asking? Or do we consider our God a simple troubleshooter so that we ask Him to resolve our problems, issues, and concerns in our minds, hearts, and realities? Or do we consider our God a simple blessing giver, so that we ask Him to give us more prosperity, more success, more health, and more and more than others? What if our expectations are not satisfied? What is the difference between the disciples or the people in Jerusalem and us? Perhaps, Jesus might keep saying to us, "You do not know what you are asking" whenever we pray to God.

Please remember the meaning of Jesus's transfiguration on Mouth Tabor. It is to reveal His identity and show His way as the Son of God and the Messiah who was crucified for our sin and for our atonement and for our salvation. This is the core that we have to look at, not His miracles like feeding, healing, casting out evil spirits, and others. Are we asking for a large gate and wide and paved road or a small gate and narrow road? Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Messiah is an Aramaic and Hebrew word; its Greek word is Christ.