It Will Be Alright

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Y. Joe Kim

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, 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, [3]and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could
bleach them. [4]And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking
with Jesus. [5]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.' [6]He did
not know what to say, for they were terrified. [7]Then a cloud overshadowed
them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved;
listen to him!' [8]Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them
any more, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he
ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man
had risen from the dead.

1. Super Bowl 52

Last Sunday I was happily surprised to see Tom Armstrong come to church wearing his Patriots T-shirt. I noticed he could not wait for Super Bowl 52. Tom and many of us hoped the Patriots would win the game. When the score was 33 to 32, I thought the Patriots were going to win again. But the winner was eventually the Philadelphia Eagles. How did you feel when the game ended? Were you upset or frustrated? A news reporter said that Tom Brady did not shake hands with Nick Foles. Brady must have been very upset and maybe angry at himself.

What we learned from the Super Bowl is that there is no guarantee that we will always win. There will be times when we are sick, sad, frustrated, even feel defeated. Everyone will experience challenges in life. Jesus and his disciples were no exception.

2. Jesus and His Disciples in Caesarea Philippi

In order to understand today's scripture, we need to read Mark's gospel chapter 8. Mark 8:27 and the following tells us that Jesus is with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi. There Jesus asks his disciples "Who do people say that I am?" They say, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." Jesus asks them. "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29).

Why does Jesus ask this question to his disciples? Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples know who He really is and help them to get ready for what is going to happen to him. After Peter's confession, Jesus says, ***"The Son***

of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again" (Mark 9:31).

Jesus tells his disciples about his impending suffering and death. This is the first time that Jesus tells his disciples about what is going to happen. It must have been shocking. Jesus' disciples were expecting him to be the ruler of Israel. They would have never thought about the death of the Messiah. But they and we need to keep in mind that Jesus talks about his resurrection.

3. The Transfiguration of Jesus

In Mark 9:2, the author says, "six days later." This means that six days after Jesus and his disciples meet in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him and goes up a high mountain. We don't know the name of the mountain. But the mountain was likely Mt. Hermon. Why are Peter, James, and John singled out for this trip? These three disciples were the inner circle of 12 disciples. Perhaps they were the ones who were ready to understood the identity of Jesus.

Why does Jesus go up a mountain with his three disciples? Luke 9:28 says they "went up onto a mountain to pray." Jesus would have known what the disciples would be feeling after learning about his suffering and death. But Jesus would have wanted to teach them that death was not the end of the story.

Mark 9:2 says, "There he (Jesus) was transfigured before them." Luke 9:29 says, "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lighting." "Transfigured" means "to be changed into another form." This word is used to describe when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. The Mark's gospel does not say in detail what Jesus looked like, but his transfiguration implies that the glory of Jesus that had been concealed is now manifested. His transfiguration reminds us of the face of Moses coming down from the mountain of Sinai. Exodus 34:30 says, "***When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him***."

What does his transfiguration mean for Jesus' disciples and for us? In Mark 8:38, Jesus says, ***"Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*** Jesus tells his disciples that he will be back with angels. So the transfiguration of Jesus would show that Jesus will be raised from the dead and come back in the glory of his father with the angels.

Verse 4 says, "***There appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus***." Why are Elijah and Moses present with Jesus? According to a rabbinic midrash, God promises in the future to bring Moses with Elijah. The rabbis taught that Moses was the first prophet and Elijah the last prophet. Both of them were commissioned to redeem Israel. The presence of Moses and

Elijah on the mountain would have reminded the disciples that Jesus was chosen by God as the redeemer.

What do they talk about? Mark does not say what they discussed. Luke 9:31 says that they ***"spoke of his*** (Jesus) ***departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem."*** "Departure" is exodus in Greek and its meaning is death of Jesus. But there must also be an allusion to the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt under Moses' leadership. Here the author implies that Jesus' departure would make God's people's exodus possible.

When a cloud overshadowed them, the three disciples hear a voice from the cloud. "***This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him***!" (verse 7). When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist they heard the same voice. Here God seems to say to the disciples of Jesus "don't be disappointed by Jesus' crucifixion. Everything will be alright."

The three disciples must be very delighted to have such an amazing experience confirming that Jesus is the Messiah that God had sent. Peter later shares his experience in 2 Peter 1:16, "***We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty***."

4. Peter's Suggestion

Verse 5 tells us that Peter's response to the transfiguration of Jesus is to build three shelters, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Why does Peter suggest to build shelters? Verse 6 says, "***He did not know what to say, for they were terrified***." Peter is excited, but there is also fear among the three disciples. Probably he wants to prolong their stay. This mountain top experience would have likely helped the three disciples to confirm who Jesus is and what God was going to do.

5. The Departure of Jesus

For three years, Jesus' disciples were always with Jesus. They never thought about Jesus' departure. When Jesus told them he would be leaving, they became afraid of the future. This situation reminds us of a parallel situation when the Israelites learned about the impending death of Moses. In Deuteronomy 31:16, God says Moses, "***You are going to rest with your fathers***." When the Israelites heard about Moses' death they would have been shocked. But Moses does not complain, and instead tells them, "***Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes***" (Deuteronomy 1:29-30). Moses reminds the Israelites that Moses is not the deliverer but God is. And God would go before them and fight for them.

The Israelites never thought about a future without Moses. They believed they would enter the promised land with Moses. But God told Moses that Moses

would not go with them. The people of Israel were like children who always want to be with their parents.

When our family lived in New Haven, CT, I was a full-time student while Christine worked. Everyday after breakfast, Christine would go to work and I took my youngest son, Andrew, to a babysitter. When I took him to a nursery school near the Divinity School he would cry. He never stopped crying until we left the nursery school. Eventually, I had to find a babysitter. The interesting thing was that when we found him a babysitter he stopped crying. When he went to college he did not call us unless he was in need of something.

6. Conclusion

When we reflect on our life's journey, there are many occasions when we have faced trials and troubles. In the moment, these situations can be difficult. But when we reflect, we often realize that we somehow overcame each challenge in our journey. At the time, we didn't know what would happen next, and yet we have overcome problems after problems and challenges after challenges.

When we reflect on the experience of the people of Israel and Moses and Jesus and his disciples on the mountain, we are reminded that God shows us that He has a bigger plan for each and every one of us and so we don't have to worry and be afraid.

The disciples were scared of Jesus' death. But God had a bigger plan for Jesus, his disciples, and every one of us. God would raise Jesus from the dead and give us eternal life. God would give us hope that Jesus would come back.

7. Application

What God showed us through the resurrection of Jesus is that death is neither the end of our life nor the end of God's love. You may have heard the story of Heather Mosher. Heather married David at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, CT on December 23, 2017. A year earlier on December 23, 2016, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. On that day, David proposed to her. Heather died 18 hours after she was married on December 23, 2017. Although David knew Heather would leave him very soon, he wanted to let her know how much he loved her. Isn't it the love of God that we experienced through Jesus Christ?

From this Wednesday, we will observe the 40 days of Lent. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. It is a time of confirming God's presence, guidance, and love through Jesus Christ. Like Moses and Jesus and his disciples on the mountain, we are reminded each day that Jesus died and rose again as part of God's perfect plan for each of us. Jesus overcame death to remind us that God is always with us, and that whatever happens in life, God is always in control and everything will be alright. Praise the Lord! Amen.