

March 3, 2019 Dan Hollis

What do we do when God shows up?

One of my favorite things about Jesus' Disciples was how often they didn't *get* it. Whatever "it" was at any given point, the Disciples are usually portrayed as clever as a brick and half as useful.

Again and again they misunderstand His messages, they do the *opposite* of what He asks them to do, and they seem to keep *forgetting* the kind of person He shows them again and again that He is.

There's nothing malicious about it. They're human: thick-skulled and out of their depth. And again and again, with all the patience and love in the world, Jesus shepherds them back onto the path. Like a mama duck whose ducklings keep blundering off into the underbrush.

In the end, when Jesus leaves them for Heaven, He knows they aren't done cooking. It will take them their entire lifetimes to really *get* what was going on during those few crazy years He walked with them... and even then it probably won't be enough.

But He tried anyway. And when He was gone He left behind the Holy Spirit to keep working on them.

Today's Scripture is another one of those moments where something happens—something Jesus had prepared the Disciples *for*—and it is immediately apparent that they have no idea what they're doing.

Jesus takes three of His Disciples to the top of a mountain—a place where Earth meets Heaven—and there He is *transfigured*. Blinding light shines out from inside Him, and He appears before them with His inner light fully visible for a few moments. A revelation from God. God revealing Godself shining out from within this physical body.

It was about as obvious as a sign could be. Like God turning on a spotlight and saying "Here I am! The presence of God stands before you and among you. This is what has been hiding beneath the surface all along."

It's a huge moment, one that marks an important shift in Jesus' ministry. 'Everything that came before was laying the groundwork for what comes next,' this moment seemed to say. It's time to take the gloves off. Time to get serious. We're approaching the home stretch, and there's work to be done. Jesus has His game-face on.

This revelation of God's presence in Jesus was so important that even Moses and Elijah, ancient prophets gone to glory centuries before, couldn't stay away. The two spirits

appear there on the mountain to witness Jesus' transfiguration themselves, which of course blows the Disciples' minds even *more*.

It's like a moment out of *The Lord of the Rings*. Bright light shines, our heroes are all but blinded, Gandalf appears from nowhere in dazzling robes, surrounded by magic, the music swells triumphantly and our hands grip the armrests of our movie theater seating...

And immediately Gimli like an idiot throws an axe at him, because that's what Gimli *does* when he's faced with something he doesn't understand.

The Disciples were a lot like that. When they witnessed this glorious moment on the mountaintop of Jesus transforming before their eyes and being met with two ancient legends like Moses and Elijah, they fell back onto what they knew. The first thing—the very *first* thing—that comes to their minds in that moment is to build *shrines* for the three of them, there on that mountain, so they can dwell there forever in their holiness and glory.

It's obvious from their response that once again, they just aren't *getting* it. For one thing, for all their time following and watching and listening to the words and acts of Jesus Christ out in the world, they're ready right now to put Jesus into a box. To build a temple for Him there on the mountain where God was revealed to them, so that God can dwell there and people will come from far and wide to journey to this one place and witness the presence of the holy.

They seemed to have already forgotten that it was *Jesus* who came to *them* when they were fishing at home. It was *Jesus* who spent years traveling from village to village, seeking out the lost and the confused and the sick and the oppressed. It was *Jesus* who had been revealing the presence of God everywhere they went, and it was *Jesus* who had little interest in staying in one place and making people come to *Him*. A church is a *great* thing to have, a shrine is a wonderful thing to travel to... but in the sainted words of Patrick Swayze, "Nobody puts baby in the corner."

Well before they got too carried away and started building shrines for three celebrities there on the mountaintop, an actual voice from the clouds has to come down and stop them. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; *listen to him!*"

Clearly they *haven't* been listening to Him up to this point if *this* is their response to the presence of God appearing in front of them.

Of course they don't know how to react to a voice from Heaven *either*, and they're immediately filled with fear and cower there on the ground. A reaction which neither Jesus

nor angels ever seemed to really enjoy. Jesus reaches out and touches them and says, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

And when they looked up... it was Him again. Just Jesus. Normal clothes, normal face, no blinding light or spiritual visitors. And he led them back down the mountain and back to the work of teaching, healing, empowering, and blessing.

But something was different now. Not for Jesus, not really, because Jesus’ divinity had been inside Him all along. For the Disciples, however, something was very different. God had *appeared* to them. As obvious as God could be. They had experienced a God-sighting bigger than the broad side of a barn, and there was no way they could have missed it. 3D, stereo surround-sound.

And for the rest of their lives they had to answer the question: what do we do now? How do we respond to *that*?

God showed up. What do we do about it?

What do we do when God shows up?

Because God shows up every day. *Every day*. I say it at Thursday Worship pretty much every week. God isn’t just out there in some far-flung Heaven that only the strongest prayers can ever hope to reach. God is active *here*, among us, all the time. There are God-moments just around every corner. Underneath every leaf. In a whiff of perfume passing by on the street, or the smell of baking bread through an open door. In the smiles of our children, in the games we play with our pets. In the close calls in the crosswalk, the lost treasure we finally discover under a couch cushion. The emergency money we forgot we hid in our glove compartment years ago that we stumble across when we are helpless and lost. The new friend who sits with us at lunch. The surprise from a loved one.

God shows up *all the time!* And a lot of times we’re as blind as the Disciples and we miss it or we don’t recognize it. And sometimes we’re as *dense* as the disciples and we don’t know how to *respond* to it even when we *notice* it.

And so I leave you a question with no answer. Or maybe a question with too *many* answers to count in one sermon. But a question that I want you to be asking yourself all day. A question the Disciples should have been asking themselves on the day of the Transfiguration, and a question that one day Jesus *stopped* asking them... because it had to be up to *them* to ask it. Every day.

What do we do when God shows up?

How do I *respond* when I witness the presence of God?

What should I do—what does Jesus want me to do? Do I grovel in fear... do I build a shrine there where I once saw God and try to hold that moment frozen in time... or does Christ want me to do something else?

What do we do when God shows up?

The Disciples spent their whole lives answering that question. Let's start today.

Amen.