

Mark 9:2-9 Sermon for 8am

We walked up and up. The three of us puffing and panting a bit as Jesus led us purposefully onwards up the rocky pathway. The sun beat down, the heat haze rose, and occasionally there was the crack of a rock or two splitting in the baking heat. Maybe the others are lucky – all nine of them having a day off, sitting around drinking water whenever they wanted it rather than puffing and panting after the dusty figure ahead winding his way around the large boulders as we stumble over the loose rocks on the path. What are we doing out here? What has the master got in mind this time?

Breathing hard, dusty, and sticky with sweat we finally get there. The three of us arriving to see Jesus smiling back at us knowingly. What lesson did the teacher have for us today that needed us to be on top of a mountain? Maybe something about God meeting the Israelites on the mountain in thunder, lightning and awesome power? Mountains have always been those kind of places, where heaven has come close to earth. Or maybe it isn't about the power of God but some lesson about God's soft voice that Elijah heard on a mountain hundreds of years ago? We look at each other and wonder what the master has in store this time!

And then we notice it. The whole world has stopped. The insects aren't buzzing, the breeze isn't blowing. Instead, the rocks are trembling as if holding an immense weight. We instinctively look to Jesus for an answer. And immediately look away. In place of the dusty sweaty figure is a bright light, almost painfully radiant. As our eyes adjust we recognise a figure at the centre. Such a bright figure...

Squinting, we glance at each other in terror. Peter whispers under his breath – "Jesus?" The figure turns and the brightness turns with him. The smile, the knowing smile – it's the same one that flashed at us before. It truly is Jesus. The world has stopped and Jesus is there as himself, but also somehow bigger. We are on the hilltop, but also somehow, this is heaven. The rocks are straining under heaven's weight but somehow also reaching out to the sky.

Others are here and Jesus is talking. People we've never seen before, but we know who they are. It can't be Moses and Elijah can it? And yet we know it is. It can't be, but they are here, shimmering in Jesus's radiance and touching the same ground we are. Peter's off stumbling towards the light and the figures, drawn by Jesus's smile. Rooted to the spot, we can only watch. Wondering. Hearts throbbing in our heads, deafening in the silence and stillness.

The light is dimmed, but only by the cloud that has come from nowhere, and yet feels like it has always been there. Then the thunder broke, saying "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." We don't so much dive to the ground for cover as we are driven to the earth by the weight of heaven. Gradually the weight releases our bodies. Limbs feel lighter. Lying face down on the rocks, there is a breath of breeze. A tentative buzzing of an insect nearby. And the rocks relax with a collective sigh. Glancing up, there is that knowing smile. The master's face still glows but his clothes are rippling in the wind and the dust is settling on them. We lie there until he comes to us.

What happened? To see heaven and live? To see what lies beyond and feel its reality and its weight and see its shimmering light. No longer afraid of what lies ahead, we lie still as Jesus's hand rests on our heads and then helps us up. We look at his face, the same but changed. So many questions, but no need to ask. The weight of the glory of heaven was all the answer we needed and all we will ever need. We can go on from today because of heaven. We can live and die because of it. We can live and die for Jesus's smile and Jesus's dazzling glory. Amen.