

“THE GOSPEL IN GREAT MOVIES – JOURNEYS WITH JESUS:  
III – THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION”

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Matthew 17:1-9

This morning, after a two-week break, we rejoin Jesus in his travels throughout the Holy Land, ministering to the people. Just to remind you – the first week, we spent with Jesus in Emmaus, as He appeared to some disciples after the resurrection, and they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. The second week, we traveled to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where he fed five thousand people with the help of the gifts of a little boy and his sack lunch.

Today, we join Jesus on a mountain – the Mount of Transfiguration. You may remember the story. Jesus took three of His disciples – Peter, James and John – on a walk up a mountain with Him. To them, it probably seemed like an ordinary walk, where Jesus just wanted some time alone, some quiet time with a few friends, some time to get away from the increasing crowds that were following them.

But it turned out to be anything but an ordinary walk, for when they got to the top of the mountain, something incredible happened. Right before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured – by that I mean, there was a supernatural event. Jesus’ face began to shine as bright as the sun, His clothing became dazzling white. I can almost imagine the disciples having to shield their eyes from the brilliance and brightness of it all. And, as if that wasn’t enough, then, suddenly, Moses and Elijah, appeared. Moses and Elijah – who, if you know your Biblical history, had been dead for hundreds of years!

It was a profound moment for all of them, and it was filled with profound significance. From that experience, they came to see very clearly that Jesus was the Messiah, and had come to fulfill what Moses the lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet had started. It was overwhelmingly powerful for these men.

And then, the icing on the cake. God spoke to them! A cloud appeared over all of them, and out of that cloud came the voice of God declaring that Jesus was indeed His beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased, and that they should listen to Him!” The scripture says that the disciples fell on their faces and were filled with awe!

Of course they did! We would have done the same thing, wouldn’t we? I mean, what would you give to have an experience like that? To see the Lord face to

face, to hear the voice of God audibly with your own ears, to know without a doubt who He is!

Well friends, moments like that don't happen every day, as much as we wish they would. Big, shining, dazzling moments that knock us off our feet.

But lest we mourn that fact, this morning I want us to remember just how often we do see God face to face, and how that happens. It may not be in a big, shining, dazzling display, but it happens nonetheless.

You might have seen God recently say, in your own journeys. I know that's the case for me and those who traveled with me to Bermuda last week. There were moments during that week when I drank in the absolute stunning beauty of Bermuda, and knew it was from the hand of God. It was, in a way, seeing the face of God to look on all that spectacular beauty He had created.

I know a lot of you have traveled this summer, and I have no doubt that the face of God was seen in places like Costa Rica, West Virginia, Cancun, Ocean City, the Outer Banks of North Carolina, Oregon, Myrtle Beach, Nicaragua. Those are just a few of the places I know some of you have been this summer. And I know that at some moment in those journeys, when you looked upon the natural beauty that was before you, you saw the face of God.

For others, your encounter with God might have come through some experience. Some of you have welcomed new members into your family, and there are surely very few experiences more powerful with God than seeing a child come into the world. Some others here saw the face of God in the experiences of Vacation Bible School – looking on the precious faces of those children and seeing how God was touching their lives, and how excited they were! And I know others saw God's face when relationships were healed, or a new career was begun, or a child graduated from high school. Precious moments when God's presence was so very near and so very real!

And today's movie clip, will show us in a powerful way, how so many times we see the face of God in other people. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that those who traveled on the mission team to Kentucky can say that. And so many others can as well.

So let me turn to the movie clip and tell you about it. The clip is from the movie "Les Miserables," which, of course, is based upon the profound novel of the same name by author Victor Hugo. It has been around forever, and made into movies and stage shows for years. The clip I'll show you this morning is from the most recent movie made of it – the musical which starred Hugh Jackman and Anne Hathaway, among others.

In case you don't know the story of "Les Mis," let me tell you a little about it. "Les Miserables" is the story of a man named Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean spent time in prison because he was caught stealing bread to feed his family. He spent nearly twenty years in prison. When he left prison, he sought refuge one night in the home of a priest, and while there, out of desperation, he stole very valuable silver. When he was caught by the police, and they brought him in front of the priest to verify the theft, the priest, instead of accusing Valjean of theft, in an incredible act of love and grace, right in front of the police, handed Valjean more silver, and said "You forgot to take this which I gave you as well."

Well, that act of love and forgiveness and grace changed the course of Valjean's life forever. He became a changed man, and spent his life caring for others, especially those in need. He befriended a woman in desperate need named Fantine, and as she died, he pledged to take care of her daughter Cosette as his very own, which he did.

There's a lot more to the story, but that's enough to show the clip I want to show you this morning. This clip actually comes at the very end of the movie. Jean Valjean is old, and nearing death. He has sacrificed much for the sake of Cosette. He has left her in the arms of her new husband and is alone, and he knows that death is imminent, and when the scene begins we hear him talking to God.

Take a look at the film now, and listen particularly to the last words he says as he moves towards the gates of heaven.

Clip from Les Mis –

Did you hear it? Did you hear their words? "To love another person is to see the face of God." In his love for Cosette, Jean Valjean saw the face of God. In your love for someone in your life, you have surely seen the face of God.

God's love is everywhere, if we but have eyes to see it. None of us ever really know when we'll see God face to face, but rest assured, we will – sometimes on journeys, sometimes in experiences, sometimes in our love for other people.

And sometimes on days like today, when we take communion together; when all three of those things come together – our journeys, our experiences, our love for each other. When we come forward standing with our friends here at church, and receive the bread and juice, and think on the love God has for us, it is ever so easy for us to see the face of God. When we remember His love that sacrificed Jesus on the cross for us, and take the bread and drink the juice, we see the face of God.

And then, we go forth stronger than when we came, because we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with us, and in us, and through us, and we are never alone. It is, like that moment on the Mount of Transfiguration for those disciples, a high, holy moment for us, and we are changed because of it.

So I invite you this morning, as you come forward for holy communion, to do it with your eyes wide open. Look around you at those who come forward with you. Look into your hands and see the bread and the juice. Look at the cross and remember Jesus' love for you. And in all those things, as you look, see the face of God.

May it be so.

Amen.