

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
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**Clarksburg, WV**

**Luke 9:28-38**

*While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. (Luke 9:34 N.R.S.V.)*

## **The Mystery of God**

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life.

In our New Testament text, Jesus decides that his closest disciples are ready for more revelation. They are ready to know God more fully. So he takes them up the mountain, and there he is transfigured before them, his clothes and his face shine. Peter wants to prolong the special moment by building a shrine there. But then God speaks to them out of a cloud, "This is my Son, listen to him." Then Jesus leads them back down from the mountain and they go back to work ministering, healing, and teaching.

The traditional interpretation of this text usually points out the similarity between what happened to the disciples on the mountain and what happens to us in worship. In worship we encounter God. God reveals himself to us. We worship God and when the experience is intense we may want to stay there with God always. But there comes a time when we must leave worship, come down from the mountain, and be at work in the world for God. All well and good, that is sound.

Today I want to focus in on the worship aspect and what happens there. The disciples encounter God and they are caught up in the event. But when they leave, they don't really know more about God than they did before. God is still a mystery that cannot be explained.

The disciples seemed to have no big problem with the mystery of God. But we modern people are far less easily satisfied. We have a scientific mind set, we want everything explained, simplified, laid out for us. So we can grasp it for ourselves.

Now let me say that if God were a total mystery, we would not be able to have a relationship with him. That is part of the reason Jesus came to earth, so that he could reveal God to us and God's character of love. That is good. But we modern people are always wanting better explanations, we want to know more. We want things explained. We even want God explained.

We preachers feel that pressure, and we are continually getting ourselves into trouble trying to explain the mystery of God. I remember one Mother's Day, Charla decided to do a children's time on the Trinity. Now that is an ambitious undertaking. It is hard enough trying to explain the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to adults. Trying to explain it to children, now that is ambitious.

Anyway, Charla started out by asking the children, “What do you call your Mother?” And they said, “Mom, mother, etc.” Then she asked them, “What does your Grandmother call your mother?” And they said, “Sally, daughter, Honey. . .” You see where she was going with this. So then she said, “And what does your father call your mother?” And one little girl said in a loud carrying voice, “Oh, I’m not allowed to say that.” So much for that explanation.

Still we keep trying to explain and understand and really grasp things in the world around us. We do that not just because we are curious, but because we believe that there is an explanation, and more importantly we believe that if we can understand how things work, we can control them.

That is key, we want to understand so we can be in control. Think about how that works in the scientific world. We have learned how to combine oxygen, gasoline, and a spark within a car engine so that instead of a dangerous explosion that would kill us all, we have power so that our cars will take us where we want to go. And they do that safely most of the time, even in the snow.

But think what we could do if we had more knowledge? When I was in high school, my science teacher told us that there is no such thing as a perpetual motion machine. Any object in motion will lose energy over time, and the motion will slow and eventually stop unless more energy is added. That is true apparently even of the motion of the earth around the sun. Scientists tell us that there are a couple of hours difference now in the time it takes the earth to go around the sun than was true a billion years ago. I am not sure how the scientists determined this, but they claim that at some point billions of years from now, the earth will lose enough of it’s speed, that the orbit will decay and it will crash into the sun.

So, no such thing as a perpetual motion machine. Except. . . scientists now tell us that at the sub atomic level, they have found something new. The electrons in an atom are not only in motion within the atom, but they are apparently going at exactly the same speed as they were a billion years ago. Imagine that! Again I couldn’t begin to prove that, but if that is true, and if we could understand how that happens and could tap into it and control it, we could be free of foreign oil. In fact we wouldn’t need oil at all. Wouldn’t that be nice?

Still when we try to apply this method to the mystery of God we get ourselves into trouble. Remember that the original sin in the garden of Eden was that Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan tempted them by saying that if they ate the fruit, they would be like God. And ever since that time, human beings have struggled with the temptation to be our own gods. We want to be in control.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of our nation’s Declaration of Independence, was an intellectual giant. That is well known. What is less well known is that Jefferson was a religious deist. He believed that God had created the world and the universe in the beginning and set them all in motion under certain rules, and then went away. He believed that God was like some great clock maker who made the clock and wound it up, then left it to run itself.

Jefferson believed that we are all on our own. He took his Bible and cut out of it anything that did not accord with logic and reason. He cut out most of the Old Testament, and all of the miracle

stories and healing stories of the New Testament. He cut out our text for today, the miracle of the transfiguration of Jesus.

He was left with a very slim volume, that reduced Jesus to the role of a good moral teacher and nothing more. In Jefferson's view human beings were in control. Now maybe that seems like a good thing at first, but think about this. If you are addicted to drugs or something else that is taking over your life, and there is no God beyond what you can understand with your own mind, there is no escape. If you have a disease and the doctors don't know how to fix it, you have no hope. If your kid is out of control and the human experts you consult don't have a good answer, you are sunk.

Here is the incredible good news. We do have hope. Because the God we serve is far greater than any human understanding. We do have help, because the God we serve is ready to enter our world and walk beside us. We do have life, and love, and joy, because the God we serve comes to us and suffers for us in order that we might be saved.

Look again at the text from Luke with me. At first when Jesus begins to glow, the disciples- or at least Peter is excited. He offers to build three booths to preserve the experience. But then a cloud comes over them and the voice of God speaks out of the cloud and they are terrified. That what the Bible says, in verse 34, they were terrified.

Have you noticed that in the Bible whenever human beings have a direct encounter with God, they are terrified? Moses before the burning bush is afraid. Isaiah when he has his vision of the throne of God is afraid. When the angel comes to Mary to tell her she is going to be the mother of Jesus, the first thing he says is "Don't be afraid." The natural human reaction when we encounter something or someone so much greater and more powerful than we are is fear. For we are not in control.

This may not be the best illustration, but as I was working on this sermon, suddenly the words of an old song came to mind. "I've got a tiger by the tail, it's plain to see. . ." Peter after his brave words about building booths, suddenly finds himself in the presence of Almighty God. And I thought that would be like thinking you were holding a old rope, only to discover that you have a hold of the tiger's tail and he is moving. Now what?

Most of the time when an angel appears to people in the Bible, the angel's first words are "don't be afraid." Here God doesn't say that. God merely tells them to listen, really listen to Jesus.

There is that about this text that doesn't sit very well with our modern mind set. Most of us come to worship, come into the presence of God, expecting answers. We read the Bible to get answers. We want things explained, laid out, so that we can get a grip on them. But what if, instead of us coming to worship so that we can get God, so that we can grasp God and therefore control God. . . What if we come here only to discover that God cannot be grasped. God cannot be controlled. Instead of us getting God, God gets us. We make ourselves vulnerable to God, and God lays hold on our lives.

If that isn't a little bit scary, I don't know what is. But at the same time it is incredibly good news.

Listen if you are enslaved by an addiction today, there is hope for you. For God is greater than you are. You can't control this addiction, but God can. Give yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let him "get you" you will never be sorry.

Listen if your kid is acting out and you are at the ends of your wits, there is hope for you. Certainly you need to avail yourself of the best human help available, but there is a far greater help also available to you. Make yourself vulnerable to Christ. Allow him to get you. It may not happen overnight, but God has the power and the will to change your life.

Listen if you have just gone through a divorce and you are hurting and devastated. If you feel like your life is spinning out of control. Then come to Christ, he loves you enough to accept you as you are and where you are, and he has the power to bring about healing and new life for you. Again it might not happen overnight, but God is faithful, and God will bring healing to your life. God will give you new life.

Listen if you have a terrible disease that is wasting your body and filling you with fear, there is one who has power beyond all human understanding. God may not give you the kind of healing that you first ask for. But our God is a God of might and love, of grace and of healing. Dare to make yourself vulnerable to God. God has greater blessings in store for you than you can ever imagine, for God is greater than the human mind.

As the music plays now. . . dare to open yourself to the mystery that is God. Beyond human understanding in power and in might, but also in grace and in love. Amen.