

# On Which Mountain Do You Set Up Your Tent?

## Mark 9:2-9 (Transfiguration)

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both...” Perhaps those words sound familiar to you. Normally I’m not a guy who enjoys a lot of poetry unless it’s the Hebrew poetry of the Scriptures. But those are the opening words to one of my favorite American poems - “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. In that poem Frost sets before the reader a picture of a fork in the road and a pondering traveler. With that fork in the road that traveller must decide which road to walk, which path to take, which way gets you to where you want to go.

Today we are at a spiritual “fork in the road”. We stand here in plain view of one road that takes us up closer to the mountain of transfiguration – the way of glory you might say. But we also see another road that takes us to the mountain of Calvary – the way of suffering you could call it, a road that is a struggle to walk. The question we ponder at these two roads diverged seeing both mountains one close and the other farther away is this: “On which mountain do you set up your tent?” We’ll answer that later, for now let’s take the road that leads to the mount of transfiguration, the way of glory.

Peter, James, and John were given this wondrous opportunity to go with Jesus up that high mountain. They surely didn’t expect to see what they did. Perhaps they thought all they were doing was getting away like Jesus sometimes did just to pray or have a private teaching moment with his disciples. But then all of a sudden this glorious event happened. Suddenly the sky lit up not with bright flood lights, but with the light of Jesus’ glory made visible before their eyes. Such amazement as they glimpsed the Lord of glory who had before only revealed it before through his miracles. Now the divine nature of God’s son shone through his human flesh. It was like a veil had been removed to uncover what was previously hidden from visible sight. Mark tells us that he was transfigured, changed before their very eyes. His clothes became whiter than white. Then joined in his glory were Moses and Elijah, two great religious leaders of their people. They were talking with the glorified Jesus. On that mountain the disciples saw heavenly glory and strangely they liked what they saw despite their fear and confusion.

Out of fear Peter didn’t really know what to say. Yet he responds to this glorious sight. “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” We can certainly understand Peter’s reaction. At such a wondrous, glorious sight wouldn’t you want to stay too in that glory? Undoubtedly Peter wanted to prolong this thrilling experience despite his fear. He wanted to freeze the scene just as it was. By offering to put up tents, he wanted to stay on that mountain. Peter wanted to preserve this glorious moment by setting up earthly shelters so these great visitors from heaven could stay and Jesus could remain as he was – in heavenly glory. This was where he wanted to be because he recognized how good it was to be there in that glory.

It certainly was good for these disciples to be there witnessing such glory. It is good for us to witness this amazing display of our Savior’s glory. This glimpse of Jesus’ glory was meant to remind us that Jesus was and always will be the eternal son of God lest we forget. Wouldn’t you rather stay on this mountain? Wouldn’t you prefer to set up tents in view of this glorious and yet strange sight just as Peter was suggesting? If we could someone hang on and stay right here then we would not have to travel the road of suffering anymore.

That other road is a struggle. In fact the Christian life is a very real struggle. In light of all the struggles, we will talk about over the next few weeks here in worship during the season of Lent, I think we all would rather stay here on this mountain and set up a tent right here right now. We struggle with our sins. We struggle against our enemy. Our struggle seems like an unfair struggle. We struggle with our own guilt. It is a relentless struggle. As much as we want to stay right here and know how good it is for us to be here, we know we can’t.

We realize that this transfiguration was just a glimpse of Jesus' glory, a glory that was hidden again behind human flesh, a glory that he needed to hide. Jesus had to travel his road of suffering so that sinners could have a shelter set up in his heavenly glory. Only then could we settle in this glorious sight forever. For now, we must go back to that fork in the road with Jesus who would now take the road to the mountain of suffering and struggle down that road to the cross on Calvary's mountain.

After the Father spoke and once again affirmed who Jesus was, the disciples found themselves alone with Jesus. They looked around. Moses was gone. Elijah was gone. So was the glory that they longed to stay in. It was just them and Jesus. They went back down that mountain and Jesus would set his face toward Jerusalem. On the way down Jesus told his disciples to keep what they saw to themselves until after they had seen him rise from the dead. Sounds curious. Why would Jesus say that?

Many in Israel did not understand Jesus or his reason for coming into the world. News was spreading that he was a miracle worker. His healings and his control over nature could be misinterpreted. Jesus needed to go down the road of suffering to fulfill what he came to do, to save us from our sins and open life in the glory of heaven for us. Only after his death and resurrection would all this become clear. Until then these disciples were to hang on to that glimpse of his glory and keep remembering it in the days that would follow heading toward Jerusalem.

Robert Frost ends his poem like this. "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by; and that has made all the difference." With the glimpse of glory fading, we are again standing at the fork in the road having seen the glory of Jesus our Savior. Now we must go take the other road. That road is long. It is harsh. It is the way of suffering. That road is filled with the potholes of our sins and the bumps of sin's harsh reality on those who sin. It is the road less traveled. Who wants to go that way? Who wants to travel down a road that shows you everything? Who wants to face the reality of our sins? Who wants to struggle with their sins? Jesus did.

Walking with Jesus on that road to Calvary, we will see punishment for our sins, a punishment we deserve, a punishment so serious that death was required. Yet it was not laid on you or me. It was laid on Jesus as he suffered and died on that mountain. Even though we will not see his glory in bright light, we will see the glory of his love. He chose this way. He chose to leave the mountain of glory and go the way of suffering and settle for a time on Calvary until it was finished. Jesus in love chose to go on the way no one would willingly travel, a way that made all the difference for you and I. He entered our struggle with sin and death to win the victory over our struggles for us. As you get ready to take the first steps down that struggling road to Calvary on Wednesday, we cannot forget what we saw here today. That glimpse of glory is what prepares us to walk that road knowing that at the end of that struggle is the glory of his victory and ours.

So on which mountain do we set up our tent? Standing at the crossroads today we have travelled one road. It certainly was good for us to be here to see Jesus' glory which prepares us to walk the road together with him to Calvary. Yet don't we need to keep a tent set up on both mountains? Without Calvary there is no hope of standing in the glory we have seen today. They are inseparably tied together. Calvary is your shelter against sin and its punishment. The mountain of transfiguration is your shelter that shows us what awaits us because Jesus who hid his glory and entered our struggle with sin was victorious for you and for me. With a tent on both mountains remembering this glimpse of Jesus' glory while keeping our eyes focused on Jesus' cross, we are equipped for the struggles we face every day.