

Mark 9:2-9

Our text recounts the transfiguration of Jesus upon a high mountain. This account is nestled within a portion of Mark that paves the way for the crucifixion (8:22-10:52). Three times in this section of the gospel Jesus predicts his coming death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Despite the dark note that these predictions sound, the account of the transfiguration provides a moment of glory in an otherwise increasingly dark story.

The transfiguration of Jesus and the sudden appearance of Elijah and Moses have the expected effect of confusing the disciples. After Peter speaks in verse 5, verse 6 explains that he did not know what to say. Such an explanation is warranted after Peter inexplicably asserts that the disciples' presence is good and offers to build three dwellings. Some commentators have suggested that the dwellings (literally, in Greek, "tents") that Peter volunteers to construct might be allusions to OT features such as the feast of tabernacles (Leviticus 23:43) or the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:7-11). While this possibility cannot be ruled out, it perhaps is more natural to understand Peter's statement as yet another example in Mark of the disciples appearing to be clueless. Frequently, in this gospel, Jesus' disciples are portrayed as failing to understand or needing to seek further clarification in order to comprehend Jesus and his teachings.

Peter's confused speech is overtaken by another voice, this one from a cloud. A reader who is familiar with the OT might pick up a resonance here of Exodus 24:15-18 which also describes a cloud on a mountain. In that case, the cloud reveals the Lord's presence with Moses. The voice from on high may also be reminiscent of the occasion of Jesus' baptism in Mark where a voice from heaven identifies Jesus as a beloved son (1:11). Likewise, a voice from on high again identifies Jesus as a beloved son here in 9:7. Unlike the voice at the baptism, however, this voice also provides instructions: "Listen to him!" Jesus' identity as God's son will be repeated once more in the gospel as the centurion witnessing the crucifixion pronounces Jesus as the son of God (15:39).

The command to silence is not unknown in Mark's gospel. After healing Jairus' daughter, Jesus issues a similar command (5:43). Likewise, after healing a deaf man, Jesus orders silence (7:36). Indeed, Jesus has warned even unclean spirits and Peter about publicizing his messianic identity (3:12; 8:30). This has become a typical characteristic of the Mark's Jesus who would prefer to keep his identity and miraculous deeds under wraps. However, Jesus' identity becomes known to the wrong people and eventually results in his arrest, crucifixion and death.