

A Fly on the Rock
Matthew 17:1-9 March 6, 2011

- I. You heard the saying about wanting to be a fly on the wall to overhear a conversation; well up on that mountain that Jesus went up on, there weren't any walls, so I wish I could have been a fly on the rock.
 - A. I've always wondered what Jesus and Moses and Elijah we talking about.
 - B. Up until Jesus, Moses was the definitive lawgiver and Elijah was the definitive prophet.
 1. They really defined what would be expected of someone taking on the mantle of either role.
 2. And suddenly here's this upstart Jesus who thinks he knows more than either one of them.
 - C. I'm thinkin' maybe that conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah wasn't all that congenial.
 1. I'm wonderin' if maybe Moses and Elijah, popped on down to put Jesus straight and to get all of his silly ideas out of his head.
 2. After all who did he think he was?

II. You see Jesus had a very different WAY about things.

He had some pretty radical ideas about the WAY to do things and the WAY things should be that didn't really square with the kind of paradigm that Moses and Elijah had been operating under.

A. First there was Moses –

1. Moses had delivered the law to the Jewish people.
 - a) **It was a law that still stood in Jesus time.**
 - b) **It is a law that still functions in many ways today.**
 - (1) There's clearly some stuff that is irrelevant to us today.
 - (2) And a whole bunch of it that got attributed to Moses, but really wasn't from him.
 - (3) But some of it is as good and relevant as it gets.
 - (4) I mean, it's hard to beat those 10 suggestions – I mean commandments.

c) **But one of the most significant features of some of Moses' laws is that much of it was designed to separate the Hebrews from the surrounding tribes; that is – to set them apart.**

2. Then there was the big issue of how Moses chose to deal with his opponents.

a) **So how did Moses deal with those who opposed him?**

b) **He killed them off.**

c) **Yup. Just had them all murdered.**

d) **No big deal. They're the bad guys; right. Get rid of them.**

e) **Would have made Machiavelli proud.**

B. So how about Elijah –

1. Like Moses, Elijah was all about following the right God.

They were both big supporters of the god called Yahweh.

2. Now for Moses and Elijah, it wasn't that Yahweh was the only God.

They believed there were other god's, but if you were going to be a Hebrew, you better be only worshipping Yahweh.

3. At the time of Elijah Israel had strayed and was also following other gods.
In particular the god Baal.
So Elijah had a little competition with the prophets of the god Baal, who Queen Jezebel was supporting.
4. Well when Elijah showed that Yahweh was the more powerful; when he had shown that their god was wimpy compared to Yahweh; did he leave it at that?
5. No, no – no way.
He had the prophets of Baal killed.
All of them.
Every single last one of them.
Now that's the WAY you do it.

C. Now Jesus comes along and he seems to have a different agenda and some different policies for how God's earthy realm should be established, as well as different ideas about the law and how to deal with your opponents. It was a radically different WAY.

1. When it came to the law, it wasn't about what would separate people and set them apart; but about what would bring them together and enhance their lives and their relationship with God.

2. The methods for bringing this about were more about persuasion, and teaching and healing and not about force.
 3. Jesus did not tell people my way or no way. He didn't say, you do exactly as I tell you or your' all dead meat.
 4. And when it came to dealing with his opponents, he didn't go with the way of Moses or Elijah. He had a radically different way of dealing with them.
 5. He taught that you should love your enemies. That you should pray for those who persecute you. That you should forgive those who harm you.
 6. Even on the cross he forgave those who were killing him.
 7. Jesus is tellin' parable's, cute little stories to persuade people to think differently.
 8. He's down there just teachin' and preachin' and healin'; even healing the Romans, his enemy and consorting with tax collectors for the Romans.
- D. Now I think Elijah and Moses saw this silly bleeding heart liberal bull goin' on and they thought they had better get on down there and straighten him out.**

You can just hear Elijah and Moses getting pumped up for the conversation and yammerin' on about how "this sissy's suppose to be from God and he's down there partyin' with the devil."

E. Yeah, Moses and Elijah, they were gonna go FIX him.

III. So I can just imagine that what was being said in the early stages of that conversation on the top of that mountain would not have received a G rating.

A. But then we have a surprise guest appearance.

B. Who shows up, but none other than -- God.

C. Now God has something that God wants to make very clear; and to be honest, before I really started thinking about this, I thought the words from God may have been meant just for the disciples that went up the mountain with Jesus; and maybe in some ways they were. But I think even more so -- the words might have been for Moses and Elijah.

D. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

E. Oh yeah!
With that the matter was clearly settled and Moses and Elijah vanished.

IV. Now I don't really have any idea what went on in that conversation; but neither does anyone else.

A. The disciples didn't tell us and maybe they really couldn't hear.
That is until God spoke up.

B. I think my speculation is a good one, if would have been consistent with who they were.

C. The one thing we can be sure of from this conversation is that God clearly was a big supporter of Jesus and what Jesus was teaching and preaching and doing.
His way.

D. It was real clear that this Jesus was very special and that God was with him 100%.

- V. One could not have walked away from a scene like that and not known in every cell of their body that Jesus was God's beloved.
- A. Which has always left me with a nagging question.
 - B. How could Peter have seen this and then in such a short while denied him?**
 - C. Yup, as soon as there was trouble, Peter bailed on Jesus. Said he'd never even met the guy.
 - D. It would have been totally understandable for one of the other disciples, or anybody who hadn't been there; but once you've been to the mountaintop – how on earth could you possibly deny Jesus?
 - E. The only way I could see it happening is if you really questioned your own two eyes; if you questioned your own sanity; if you didn't believe that what you had experienced was really real.
The only way Peter could deny Jesus was to deny himself.

- F. Maybe you could chalk it up to the mushrooms you picked for dinner, or something else you consumed; but then there was James and John, who were there with you and could corroborate your experience.
- G. And to be honest, this just isn't helping me. I just can't figure it out. For the best of me it just doesn't make sense.
- H. You know, for you or I to deny Jesus, I can kind of understand that. We weren't there. We didn't walk and talk with him. We don't have firsthand knowledge. We don't even have 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th hand knowledge. We certainly didn't get to go up on the mountaintop with him and see him transfigured, see his spiritual nature overshadow his material appearance.
- I. If we've got questions going on in our head about Jesus, I think that's only natural. But for Peter? I just don't get. Yet despite his non-sensical, irrational, self-denying denial of Jesus;

Jesus still loved him and reassured Peter that God still loved him.

VI. So what does this tell us?

- A. Well, it tells us that Peter was pretty messed up.
- B. But it also shows us that even the best of them had some faith issues goin' on.
- C. It shows us that not having it all together, having some questions and doubts; that's not going to separate us from God's love.
- D. It shows us that fear and anxiety can't separate us from God's love.
- E. It shows us that even denial of Jesus can't separate us from God's love.
- F. God knows it's not easy.
And more than anything, I think God just wants us to be honest with ourselves.
Of course, God knows that even sometimes we were not even really sure what being honest with ourselves really means.
And so God is just there waiting for us.
After all God's got all the time in the world; and even more beyond that.

So take your time.
God's not going anywhere.
AMEN.