**Sermon for FEB. 11, 2024 Mark 9:2-9 “Full Disclosure”**

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

The Sundance Mexican restaurant in Bowling Green, Ohio was where I was working 40 years ago, waiting tables. I was an enthusiastic and energetic waiter. We served the usual college-town type of big plate Mexican food and appetizers, full bar, you get the picture. And so it was, one day, I was summoned to a table where I had just moments before delivered our signature giant burritos, and as I approached, the looks of horror on the customers faces raised my blood pressure a bit. They said nothing, just pointed…and there, on top of her burrito, a little sliver of lettuce was moving, in a way that lettuce really can’t move, but an inchworm can. Awkward! And flustered, I reached over and plucked the little worm off her entrée, and said, “It’s such a big burrito, I am sure he didn’t eat much!” And walked away.

In retrospect, I’m sure I could have handled that more professionally; my manager certainly seemed to think so! Still, that ended better than the time I was still new on the job, and my customer was a well turned out African American woman. We had been trained to introduce ourselves, and say, I will be your server today! But something went awry, and I ended up saying, “Hi, my name is Dave and I will be your slave today.” Awkward! It was a tense lunch and no tip for me, and who could blame her? Eventually, the manager and I turned me into a decent employee who did not get fired and who worked there for three years, but there were plenty of awkward moments.

We could all share stories of when we got flustered and said or did things that created social unease, and maybe you think this level of disclosure from your pastor is a wee bit much. I share today, not out of any need for self-mortification, but as a preamble to the full disclosure that Jesus offered in today’s scripture, the story of his transfiguration, and the odd effect that disclosure had on his closest followers. What I hope we can harvest from this story are some ways to redeem the awkward moments, or maybe not even create them at all. And there are two excellent ways revealed in this story…let’s explore them now.

A key element here is that Jesus doesn’t gather random folks for this epiphany field trip; only his most trusted, most spiritually sure-footed schlep up the mountain with him. There has been a lot of speculation about him and his abilities, his actual identity, his motivations. Things have been awkward, ambiguous. And so, up there in the great outdoors, Jesus discloses his true nature to these trusted friends in an effort to set their minds and hearts at ease. See, guys, *this is who I really am*. And now you know why and how I can do and know the stuff I do and know. We don’t know how they reacted, because the writer rushes forwards, with both Moses and Elijah appearing, and the three religious men have a bit of the reunion. Ironically, this event, *designed* to set their hearts at ease, gets the disciples really worked up, so awkward, so unsure what is going on, and finally Peter, our impetuous leader, blurts out, well, no sense standing around in the sun all day. Let’s build some shade canopies for our honored guests! They were terrified, uncomfortable in the extreme, and like me in my college days, just blurted out the first thing that came to mind. Evidently, they had not yet been schooled on the need to have your brain in gear before engaging your mouth!

The solution to their confusion was literally dropped out of the sky; a cloud surrounded them, solving the need for shade, and a voice came out of the cloud, declaring Jesus the beloved Son, one who should be listened to. And when they opened their eyes, it was just them and Jesus, and they were left to sort out their own conclusions…privately, without discussion, and certainly without debate in the public forum. The intent of the whole scenario was to confirm them in their faith, to set their minds at ease, but that isn’t how it played out in real time. Intense spiritual experiences usually make folks really uncomfortable, and when things get awkward, there is no telling what we will say or do.

I mentioned earlier that this story contained *two* clear remedies to the awkwardness in which we so often find ourselves embroiled. The first is the revelation of Jesus’ true character. For those original aspiring Christians, his self-sharing made a huge difference; they all went on to become effective leaders of the early church. And all these centuries later, this still holds true, that the most effective leaders are the ones who understand and embody the revealed character of Christ. Most of us are not treated to a mountaintop experience of that intensity, but all of our little intensities, from Sunday School and church camp and parents and grandparents add up. We listen and read and live and somehow, we absorb enough of the nature of Christ that we are inspired to model that in the world, to show what we know through the way we live and love.

The second bridge out of awkwardness is the voice of God, who speaks without confusion and settles our fluttering hearts. And again, most of us don’t get the cloud-shrouded auditory experience that Peter and his friends received, but neither is the voice of God absent in our time; in our hearts, in our minds, motivating us into confident compassion in a dicey world. Between a real sense of who Jesus is, and a deep trust in the voice of God bubbling up within us, we can manage life with a lot more thoughtfulness and a lot less awkwardness.

My proof of that came in my final year at the Sundance Restaurant, Bowling Green, Ohio. I was waiting on a large table, getting the dinners ordered. I had just delivered all eight soft drinks in one trip, by hand, no tray, it is quite dramatic when it works, and we were all of us in a good mood. And I was excited to go get their supper ordered up, so excited that I failed to notice a little kid had toddled around the edge of the table and was standing right behind me. So, with a cheerful, “Be right back”, I launched kitchenward, and just annihilated that little kid. Plowed him right down, never saw him till it was too late. And you know how it is, when a little kid is so stunned that they don’t even cry, just gasping for breath…awkward! But unlike the first year as a server, I didn’t try to shift blame, or say something clever, or wiggle out of it. The restaurant froze in time while we lifted up that little kid and got him sorted out. I was all compassion and deep apology, and everybody knew it was a pure accident, and it all ended well. But imagine how poorly it *could* have gone, if I had cracked wise, or tried to blame the child, or chastised the parents for letting him wander around. That was the spring before I started seminary; I was a better waiter, sure, but more importantly, I was a better young man. I knew from within that the only appropriate response was tenderhearted apology and what healing could be brought from our common humanity. No lawsuit, no lasting trauma to child or family…they would come in every so often and joke about me looking before leaping. And I cherished that the awkwardness had been healed by the balm of godly sensitivity.

So, the next time things are awkward, remember the revealed nature of your Lord. Listen deep for the urgings of God within you. Take a deep breath, and then, say something compassionate. Repeat as necessary. Amen.