

February 17, 2016

*I Have Sinned: Unbalanced*

Mark 9:2-8

**Opening words:** One of our basic human spiritual needs is for forgiveness. It is one of the things that draw us to Jesus. Jesus did not come into the world to be our role model. Jesus did not come into our world to be our teacher. Jesus did not come into our world to entertain us. Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. Never forget, Jesus is our Savior. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Lent is a time to confess our sins and repent.

This is message number three in my eleven-part sermon series, *I Have Sinned!* If you were with us on Sunday, then you may remember my message, *I Have Sinned: Half-Heartedness*. Many churches are guilty of this sin because they have confused tolerating fellow church members with loving fellow church members. On Sunday, my message is called, *I Have Sinned: Prejudices*. The topic is very obvious. Today, my message is call *I Have Sinned: Unbalanced*. There should be a balance in every church between worship and missions. Our Gospel lesson for this evening is Mark 9:2-8.

**Mark 9:2-8** After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

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On June 16, 2012, Nik Wallenda fulfilled his lifelong dream; he walked over Niagara Falls. Tens of thousands of people gathered around the falls on that Friday night to watch him do it, and millions more watched on television. I was one of the millions. He walked on a two-inch wire that was suspended 200 feet in the air over the Horseshoe Falls. It took him less than twenty-five minutes. It really was amazing! I have a difficult time walking on ice. Can I state the obvious?

Keeping your balance is important! My mother, a proud dietitian, always told me to each a balanced diet. There should be balance between your professional life and your

personal life. We are told we should have a balanced portfolio. In a democracy, we are always looking for a balance between state's rights and national leadership, individual freedom and what is best for the whole. It is even true in church. In the life of the church we are always looking for a balance between the sacred and the social, between worship and missions. It is those last two balancing factors that I want to look at this evening. The perfect balance between worship and missions is found in this evening's Gospel lesson, the Transfiguration. Just like Nik Wallenda, it is important that we keep our balance. If we fall, it will be our demise. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves this evening in the ninth chapter of Mark. The story was read to you individually, but it really doesn't stand alone. The story prior to this one sets up our reading. You know that story. Jesus asked the disciples what people were saying about him. To be more exact, Jesus asked them, "Who do people say I am?" Various answers are given by the disciples. Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; and still others, one of the other prophets. Jesus hears those names but is not impressed. The reason is simple. He really doesn't care what others are saying about him. He only cares about what the disciples think about him. He asks a more pointed question, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" The voices that filled the air seconds earlier grew silent. Suddenly, only one voice is heard, Peter. He answers clearly and correctly. He says, "You are the Christ." It is a pivotal moment in Jesus's ministry. The journey to the cross had begun. The scripture lesson for this evening confirms the accuracy of Peter's answer.

According to the text, six days later, Jesus takes the inner circle, Peter, Andrew, James and John to the top of a high mountain. Many believe the mountain was Mount Tabor, which stands 1,800 feet high, others say it was Mount Hermon, which stands over 9,000 feet high. Regardless, they go to the mountaintop for two reasons, solitude and prayer. It is at that moment the unexplainable happens. The Bible says Jesus was transfigured. I am not exactly sure what that means, so I can't explain it. It will have to suffice to say that Jesus's appearance changed. He became transparent and luminous at the same time. The four disciples were shocked. Then, this strange story gets stranger. Without warning, the two greatest personalities of the Old Testament suddenly appear. There was Moses, the great law giver and there was Elijah, the greatest of all the prophets. Then suddenly God, hidden in a cloud, appears and announces to everyone that Jesus is his son. The question of Jesus's identity is answered. Peter was right, Jesus was the Messiah. Things would never be the same again. Yet, this story is more than a story about identity. The story teaches us several things; one is balance.

If you look at the disciples in the story, both the ones on the mountaintop and the ones in the valley, you learn something. Both parties emphasize two different things. The disciples on the mountaintop emphasize worship; the disciples in the valley emphasize missions. Both are good and can stand alone. Yet, both are maximized when they act together. For the church to be the church that God intends, the two, worship and

missions, must be kept in balance. Neither one is more important than the other. It is a little complex; I hope you understand. If you are ready to do both things, say, **"Amen!"**

First, Peter, one of the disciples on the mountaintop, emphasized worship. If you want to exist as a church then you must worship. It is the one thing the church must do and still be considered a church. Peter understood the importance of worship. Look at the story with me. Peter is at the top of the mountain with Andrew, James and John. They thought they were going to be alone with Jesus to pray. They experienced so much more. They experienced God! It must have been great. Peter appreciated the moment so much he didn't want to leave. What did it say in verse 5? Peter said, *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* Peter emphasized worship.

I appreciate this church so much, because we spend so much time worshipping. We worship three times every Sunday morning. We worship at various times and in various ways. We worship three times on Christmas Eve and four times on Easter morning. We worship on Wednesday evenings during Lent. True worship has nothing to do with hymnals, projection systems and organs. True worship has everything to do with experiencing God. Peter emphasized worship and so do we! If you are going to be a church, then you have to worship! At this church we value worship. If you can agree with that fact, say, **"Amen!"** Peter, one of the disciples on the mountaintop, emphasized worship!

Second, the other disciples in the valley emphasized missions. In the reading beyond our story, Jesus descends the mountain with Peter, Andrew, James and John. The four must have been on a spiritual high, but the reality of this world was waiting for them. The other eight disciples are debating with a crowd. In the eye of a debate was a demon-possessed boy. Jesus exorcised the demons because the disciples were unable to do the miraculous. However, they were trying to respond to human need. Responding to human need is important because it shows the world our faith. Never forget it, your life is a witness. You may be the only Bible someone ever reads. Worship is good for your soul, but mission is good for our world. If you are going to be a church, then you must emphasize mission; there are so many hurting people.

I appreciate this church because we emphasize missions. Have you ever taken an inventory of all the mission outreaches? The sewing ladies have made dresses for children in Haiti. The Helping Hand Closet raises money for a variety of people who are in need locally. The prison ministry strives to save the incarcerated. Our youth go to help the poor every summer in other communities. Our Blanket Ministry offer blankets to orphans to remind them that someone cares. We are organizing a trip to Belize to help those who are living in poverty. The Giving Tree makes sure everyone gets a Christmas present. Our efforts in Russia have helped teenagers walk for the first time and give them a chance at a future. In our church, mission is not an extracurricular

activity, it is a core value. I appreciate this church because we have a passion for missions. If you can agree with that fact, say, "**Amen!**" The disciples in the valley emphasized missions! What kind of a church has no interest in missions? The church is the only organization that exists for the benefit of its non-members.

It is a great balancing act. The church can't be a church without worship; the church stops being the church God intended without missions. The two are interrelated. They are two separate things that need one another. I appreciate our denomination because we emphasize both.

The father of the great Methodist movement was John Wesley (1703-1791). You know his story. He was homeschooled in Epworth, England by his mother, Susanna. He went to Christ College in Oxford. It was while he was there he formed a small group called the Holy Club. They gathered for three reasons: Bible study, prayer and debate. At some point, the group decided those sacred acts were not enough. They went to the poorest people in that community and sacrificed for their benefit. The Holy Club had perfect balance. They balanced worship and missions. I appreciate the United Methodist church because of that balance. That balance of worship and missions is in our DNA. I pray we never lose our balance.

Will you pray with me?