

Rooted: Solitude
March 5, 2017
Luke 9:28-36

Passage: ²⁸ About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. ³¹ They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

³² Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ³⁴ But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

³⁵ Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." ³⁶ When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Welcome to CrossPoint on this first Sunday of Lent. This Lenten season we are going through our series entitled Rooted. This is an exciting series for us because we are focusing each week on spiritual disciplines that have the power to transform our lives. We believe here at CrossPoint that our mission is to love God, love others and make disciples. Spiritual disciplines are in fact one of the core ways to realize that mission. In fact, one of the characteristics of disciples is that they are seeking deeper intimacy with God which is found through the spiritual disciplines. So over the next several weeks we will be unpacking a number of spiritual disciplines in the hopes that as we do that, we will continue to grow together as a community and deepen our relationship with God.

Spiritual disciplines = Intimacy with God

When I was growing up, I remember that whenever one member of the family was cleaning something, it meant that the rest of us were to jump in and help. For example, when I was in high school, whenever my mom or dad would empty the dishwasher, it really didn't matter what I was doing, the expectation was that I would come over and start putting stuff away. If someone was vacuuming in the house, you looked for something else to do, whether it was folding laundry, taking out the trash, or putting away your stuff. Honestly, it was a wonder that the dogs didn't start putting away their toys when we were busy cleaning the house. That was the culture of my house growing up. It was so pervasive that nobody had to be asked to do something because you would feel uncomfortable when someone else was doing something if you weren't helping. Now there are some great lessons that I learned from that, but I also have a difficult time sitting still now. Anyone else relate to that? How many of you take work home with you? Or worse take it on vacation with you? How many of us fill up our schedules to the point of bursting?

We live in a culture that glorifies busyness and we feel guilty when we aren't being "productive." Honestly, whenever I'm asked how I'm doing, I always seem to respond with, "busy, but good." I've grown to say that as though it were a badge of honor and yet I think there is something even deeper than that. If I'm honest and really taking a moment to look at it, I'm actually saying that I'm busy as a way of justifying my value, of justifying my worth in society. You see, let's be honest, when we're at work and we put in those 60-hour work weeks or we work ourselves sick taking care of the kids, there is part of us that is trying to earn value by our productivity. The message is often clear to us that you are worth what you produce. So, when someone tells us to Be Still or to sit in silence and solitude, or to pray

we feel uncomfortable because we aren't "producing anything." If we listen to this voice, however, we will begin to learn that our value lies outside our productivity.

Our worth is more than what we produce.

This morning's passage will speak to this point and demonstrate a powerful corrective for us that we can use to change our perspective and the way we do things.

Read Passage

There is a lot going on in this passage and is probably the content of several sermons, but I want to focus specifically on Jesus going up on the mountain and the actual transfiguration that is taking place.

Now we first need to give our passage a proper context. This comes only a week after the feeding of the five thousand. Talk about productivity! If productivity determines value, this is the moment for Jesus, isn't it? I mean Jesus takes five fish and two loaves of bread and feeds five thousand people. Yet then comes our passage for this morning and it stands as an incredible contrast to that moment. Jesus goes away to the top of a mountain with just three of his disciples. Now imagine what would happen in our society if someone were to do something of the same magnitude as feeding the five thousand. In the business world that is a momentum builder. They tend to milk the publicity for as long as they can. In fact, most organizations and people coming off a big event like that are excited and looking to capitalize on that momentum, but Jesus seems to be the exact opposite. He has the miraculous moment and then heads up the mountain to be alone with God. This feels upside down doesn't it? I mean he doesn't even show up at any of the morning talk shows and talk about his experiences, he just takes some time to go off to the mountains.

I think to understand this fact, we have to realize two things. First, the temptation we have to do that next big thing or to build on momentum often comes from our desire to find our worth outside of God. The thinking goes like this: I do something. I am praised for it. Therefore, I am valued. This line of reasoning is why we find Jesus' next steps a little jarring. It stands completely contrast to that way of thinking and living. It actually leads us to the second thing we need to realize: Jesus finds his worth and value in God alone. Did you hear that? In God alone. Not the work of God, but God. Here is what I mean. We often determine the quality of our relationship with God by what we have done for God. So, if we have served at the food pantry or we have helped with hospitality then we must have a solid relationship with God. Those things are great things to do and the church needs them, but that is not what defines our relationship with God. Let's be honest, how many times have we heard the story of someone who by all outward appearances was following God only to learn that they harbored a secret life that was finally exposed leading to shame and disgrace? The truth is that we can get so caught up in the work that God is doing, that we miss God in the process.

Jesus shows us a better way. He does these amazing things, but he is grounding himself in something apart from those things. He works miracles, he heals people, he feeds the five thousand, but he doesn't live for the affirmation of men or the good feelings that come from doing good. He lives only for the Father. He has surrendered entirely to his will and he grounds that by taking time away with God.

Our passage puts Jesus before the Father in solitude. Let's note that the apostles have fallen asleep (they seem to do this at the worst possible times). In this moment, Jesus is transformed. His face is altered and his robes become white. You see it is the revealing of the true nature of Jesus. It is the revealing of Jesus as the beloved of God. This is a glimpse of Jesus' true identity and a glimpse of God's glory. Yet notice that it only happens away from the crowds and those cheering him on. It happens without the affirmation of others and without the steady productivity that we are so accustomed to. It only happens when he has intentionally left all of that behind to spend time with God. This is the heart

of solitude. It is the place where God reveals our true identity. It is the place where catch a glimpse of God's glory.

Solitude is the place where God reveals our true identity.

²⁸About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Luke 9:28-29

This should be great news to many of us. For many young people, there is always the question, what do you want to be when you grow up? For most adults, one of the first questions we are asked is what do you do? These questions seem to suggest that what we want to be or what we do somehow defines us. So, we keep striving to do more so that we can be more. Yet, Jesus demonstrates in this passage that these are false notions. We hear it and we know it to be true but habits die hard don't they?

Let me share how easy it is to forget these things. For much of my life I had striven to be at the top of the class. In high school, it pushed me to take as many advanced classes as I could. I began to define myself as the person who got the top grades in everything. I entered college with much the same attitude. I started out as a Chemistry and math double major. I continued to live with the identity that I had to have the top grades in every class. Yet a couple months into my first semester I reconnected with my faith. I began to understand this new identity that God wanted for me. Grades became less defining. Sure, they were still important, but they did not control my life anymore. They were not the thing that my identity became wrapped up in. I began living into this new identity that God had revealed to me. That is, I was a child of God. I would love to say that the story ends there with the phrase and I lived happily ever after, but the truth is, old habits die hard. I can't tell you when it happened, or how, but what can I tell you is that I eventually found a new identity as the one who excelled at math. It again became my identity and how I defined myself. That identity again took root so much in fact that I had to be at the top of the class that if I were to ask for help I would perceive it as being a weakness. This set the stage for graduate school. It was there that that identity came crashing down around me. I left after two semesters completely broken and exhausted. I had forgotten the identity that God had given to me and chased after a false idea of who I was. Yet, God did something amazing in that time. He introduced me to solitude. He beckoned me away from all of that and poured out a new identity in my life.

It is always tempting to fall into those old identities, isn't it? We see it in scripture in the lives of many of those who came before us, but more than that we see it in our own lives. Jesus models for us the way to recover that identity. It comes through solitude. It comes by putting ourselves before God alone. Jesus is literally transformed by God in this moment. The reality of who Jesus is begins to shine forth when he is alone with his Father.

What is the purpose of solitude? Jesus consistently demonstrates the need for it, yet how does one recover their identity in solitude with God? To help me illustrate that I want to talk about my relationship with my dad. My dad and I are pretty close. As I like to say, most people grow out of their dad as their hero phase, I just keep growing into mine. Despite that fact, however, there have certainly been times where I have taken him for granted, where I have failed to be intentional with my time with him. Recently, however, I have started doing a regular lunch with him. These lunches have had a way of deepening our relationship. We have always been close, but I feel even closer to him since we've been doing these lunches. Why is that? Because I'm spending intentional time with him, where he is my focus. Where we can both share about our weeks and what is going on in our lives. Honestly, these lunches have helped me to see just how much I am like my dad. It is ever the reminder that I am my father's son. We need this same time with God, where there is a place apart that he becomes our sole focus. Solitude not only recovers our identity, it deepens our relationship with God.

Solitude creates intimacy with God.

Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Luke 9:35

There is a longing in the hearts of humankind. There is a desire for intimacy. We just finished our series on relationships and we talked about our need for relationships. Yet even if we have great relationships, there is still something in us that is not satisfied fully. It is the deeper relationship with God that we long for, that we crave. Augustine once said that our souls are restless until they have rest in God. [Pic of quote]. It is this deeper relationship with God that is satisfied through solitude. It has a way of restoring the weary and finding the joy that is accompanied only when our identity in Christ has its firm foundation.

Now for most of this sermon we have focused on Jesus going up on the mountain and I haven't said much about these two random visitors he gets: Moses and Elijah. Yet, here I want to point out something rather remarkable. Both of these men have incredible encounters with God. Moses talks to God as if talking to a friend. He is privileged to see the back of God. Elijah has a similar encounter also on the mountain where God shows up in a whisper. These moments are found in solitude. Both of these men are changed dramatically as a result of them. In fact, Moses has an interesting effect that seems to point towards this transfiguration moment. Moses' face actually begins to glow and emit this light. It is the reflection of God. It is so stunning in fact, that he ends up wearing a veil to cover his face so that the Israelites don't become fearful. These moments for them often came when they were tired and exhausted with trying to do things on their own or when things didn't go their way. Yet they are restored afterwards and are strengthened.

You see here is the final part about solitude. We don't stay there forever. Yes, there are monastics who do that, but even they engage with the world in different ways. Solitude restores us and reminds us of our identity in Christ and then moves us back into the world that so desperately needs the hope of the world: Jesus Christ. You see, for many who don't take time in solitude they simply live from that false identity or a shadow of our real identity. Yet when we take time in solitude. When we put ourselves before the feet of God, we begin to live from that union. We live from a restored identity that affects everyone we come into contact with.

Imagine if we did that as a community. Imagine if each of us took time in solitude to recover our identity in Christ and lived from that union with God. Lived with a deeper relationship with God. That is the heart of the Church and the heart of this community. To remind us of this fact and where our identity as a community is anchored we are called to remember the sacrifice of Christ as well... Communion.