

READING FROM THE GOSPELS: Luke 9:28-36

*Keeping Silent*

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Denial can be a very powerful mental tool when it comes to your survival. Denial can serve as a temporary Band-Aid to protect you from having to face some of the terrible realities in this world that you might not be ready to handle ... such as the impending death of a loved one ... or denial can actually protect you from something in your past that you'd just as soon not remember such as physical or emotional abuse.

Denial can help you go on living your life ... so you don't get bogged down in reliving and walking through the muck of a past emotional trauma ... or it can help you to not accept the fact that something is true when you just don't want to believe it is.

Short-term denial can be a good thing, because it can provide you with time to heal or prepare yourself before dealing with a difficult issue. The problem, however, is when you stay in denial ... when you refuse to accept something or deal with something in your life. That's when denial does nothing but imprison you. The harder you attempt to forget something ... or to not accept it ... the higher you have to keep building the walls to keep from dealing with reality ... or the truth.

Peter ... the rock on which Jesus Christ will build His church ... is in denial. He loves the fact that Jesus is the Messiah ... it's just that Peter's not willing to accept what that means ... to Jesus or to himself. All this stuff about death and resurrection doesn't easily fit into this disciple's world of reality. However, up on a mountaintop, Jesus will try again ... to convince him otherwise. Because only when Peter can accept who Jesus is ... and what is going to happen in Jerusalem ... can he truly be that rock for Christ. And the same is true for us.

Denial can keep us from being what Christ calls us to be and to do in this world. So listen with your heart to these words of our Lord from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 9, verses 28-36.

**9:28** Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

**9:29** And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

**9:30** Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.

**9:31** They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

**9:32** Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

**9:33** Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let

us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said.

**9:34** While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

**9:35** Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

**9:36** When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent ... and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

This is the word of our Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

The first week of my trip to Israel was spent in and around the Sea of Galilee. Except for a little rain the first couple of days, the weather was beautiful. It was so peaceful in that part of the country as we visited those Holy places where Jesus walked and ministered to the people.

A few of us even made a walk along the shore of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum where Peter lived, past the place where the Jesus spoke the Beatitudes, and to hillside where he fed the 5000. But as that first week was coming to a close, there was a general consensus of all of us pastors that we'd just assume stay in Galilee than to go to Jerusalem.

Many of us started this journey feeling very tired and the week in the northern part of Israel had been so refreshing. But the thought of enduring the emotional places in Jerusalem where Jesus was beaten, crucified and buried ... well, that seemed just a bit too much. The comments kept flowing ... "Let's just stay here, in Galilee. Two weeks here will be just fine." But ... we knew we had to go on to Jerusalem ...

Peter's not so sure anymore about this rabbi he's been following around Galilee. Just prior to their trip up the mountain ... Jesus had told his disciples that he would endure extreme suffering and be crucified before rising from the dead on the third day.

Peter didn't want to hear it then ... and he doesn't want to hear it now. Messiahs are strong and powerful and they overthrow tyrants with the wave of their hands ... they're not some sort of sweet and compassionate person who meekly walks to his death on a cross. That's not going to happen ... never. Death is not something he wants to hear about.

But ... up there on a mountaintop ... shimmering in a glowing holy light ... and with Moses and Elijah standing beside him ... Jesus Christ once again affirms what he's going to do ... and this time, to add a little moreumph to it ... God's own voice booms through the fog surrounding the disciples ... "This is my Son ... the beloved ... Listen to him!"

Sort of like a divine intervention ... if you still don't get it ... maybe now you will. However,

denial can be pretty hard to knock down. It is for Peter as well as the other two disciples with him.

Here on Mount Tabor they witness the most amazing event in the history of the world ... what we now call the Transfiguration of Christ ... the ultimate revelation of who Christ is and what Christ came into this world to do ... a foreshadowing of the events in Jerusalem and the resurrection to follow. And look what happens ... they just walk away ... scratching their heads ... not even willing to talk to anyone about it in the days that follow.

No doubt about it, they, too, would just rather stay in Galilee than go to Jerusalem. After all ... why go to Jerusalem? Things are going so well here. People like us here. Life is good here.

Peter's trapped in his world of denial ... and it's going to take a lot more effort on the part of Jesus to break through it ... and that won't happen until the predicted events occur when they get to Jerusalem.

What Christ ends up doing in Jerusalem is to shatter the walls of Peter's denial ... there will no longer be any question on his part ... he will finally understand what Christ had been teaching him ... that in order for the sins of this world ... Peter's sins ... your sins and my sins ... to be forgiven ... in order for death itself to no longer hold us in bondage ... then Jesus must go to Jerusalem ... he must die on the cross ... he must rise again ... to offer the world salvation and a new law to be written into the hearts of the people.

And the good news of all this is that what Christ does in Jerusalem can also shatter the denial you may be holding onto in your own life. Because just like he did for Peter ... Christ came into this world to bring wholeness and healing to your life ... to tear down the walls of denial that prevent us from living our lives as God has created us to live.

And when that happens ... when our walls of denial come falling down ... then, and only then, are we able to fully live our lives in an honest and loving relationship with our Savior ... and to experience the grace of God's blessings and God's unconditional love. But also, like Peter ... it's not like throwing a light switch. Like anything that requires changing one's life ... tearing down a wall of denial is a journey ... a process ... and hard work ... but the joy comes in knowing that Christ leads you through that wilderness into the Promised Land.

There are so many ways that denial can harm our relationships with each other and with God. Denial can come in so many disguises ... Fits of uncontrollable anger can destroy the most important relationships in your life when it turns into rage, emotional abuse or even violence and physical abuse against those you love the most.

It's so easy to blame someone else ... than it is to open the door to this reality. I've known so many people who go through life denying that they deal with depression. And sadly, if you don't confront it or its underlying cause ... depression can often leave you with feelings of worthlessness or a lack of confidence that make you believe you are isolated and lost in the world.

Yet there are so many ways to overcome or improve depression. We so often hear about “**other people**” who have allowed drugs, alcohol, food, gambling or other addictive behaviors to overwhelm their lives ... but have **you** ever denied that you have such a problem? Or is it possible that you are enabling the behavior of someone with an addictive behavior ... a spouse or child ... a close friend ... a parent ... hiding the truth ... ignoring the elephant standing in the middle of the floor?

I know ... I’ve been there myself ... it’s what finally led me to change the direction of my life and to become a pastor. The truth is ... we are so tempted to stay where we are ... to just keep putting up with the pain of denial instead of dealing with it. Because when we even consider the possibility of making a change ... to begin a journey to leave the denial behind ... we probably believe it’s just going to be too hard ... too painful ... to bear.

That’s when we need to remember that Jesus has already made that journey for us ... and goes with us on our journey to change our lives. He not only stays with us as we go toward Jerusalem ... but he promises us the gift of freedom at the end of it ... because of what His death and resurrection accomplished.

Even though no one in my group of pastors wanted to leave Galilee and go to Jerusalem, it actually turned into the most deeply meaningful part of our trip ... for there we understood the gift Christ made to us ... and has made to you.

When you make that journey with Jesus ... when you come out of denial with his love and his help ... you will reclaim the life Christ has always wanted you to have ... you will grow and be strengthened ... in fact ... you will be transfigured.

Let us pray:

Jesus, take us to the mountain, where, with Peter, James, and John ... we are dazzled by Your glory, Light as blinding as the sun. There prepare us for the night by the vision of that sight. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**