

## HOW DO YOU CAPTURE MYSTERY?

(Matthew 17:1-9)

Intro: How do you capture mystery?

- Mystery of God.
- Mystery of Jesus.
- Mystery of the Holy Spirit.

I. Peter Tried.

A. Jesus Was Transfigured.

1. Jesus went up a high mountain.

a. We don't know which mountain.

-Some think it might have been Mount Hermon.

#Way in the north.

\*Along the northern border of Israel.

#Over 9,000' high.

\*Highest mountain in all of Israel.

#Sometimes called the Grandfather.

\*Because its peak is covered with snow.

+Most of the year.

-Others think it might have been Mount Tabor.

#Known today as the Mount of Transfiguration.

#Near Nazareth.

\*Closer to where Jesus and his disciples hung out.

#Not nearly so high.

\*Mere 1,843'.

\*Although it towers over the Jezreel Valley.

\*Much easier to climb.

b. Mountains were thought to be places of:

-Revelation.

-Encounters with the Divine.

#Mount Sinai.

\*Where Moses received the 10 Commandments.

+Exodus 24:12-18.

\*Where Elijah went to have a conversation with God.

+1 Kings 19.

2. Jesus was transfigured.

a. His face shone like the sun.

b. His clothes became dazzling white.

-He appeared in all of his heavenly glory.

3. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus.
  - a. Moses.
    - Representing the Law.
    - Died.
      - #But was taken by God.
      - \*Buried.
      - #So that no one knew where his grave was.
      - \*Deuteronomy 34:5-6.
  - b. Elijah.
    - Representing the Prophets.
    - Never did die.
      - #Was taken up into heaven by God.
      - \*In the whirlwind.
      - \*In the fiery chariot.
      - +2 Kings 2:11.
4. Divine voice spoke from the heavenly cloud.
  - a. "This is my Son,"
    - “The Beloved;”
    - “With whom I am well pleased;”
  - b. "Listen to him."
    - Matthew 17:5.
  - c. Those words are an echo of those at Jesus' baptism.
    - Matthew 3:17.
      - #Jesus' baptism.
        - \*Began the Epiphany season.
        - +Back in January.
      - #Jesus' transfiguration.
        - \*Brings to an end the Epiphany season.
        - +8 weeks later.
5. What happened to Jesus on that mountain.
  - a. His glorious appearance.
  - b. Moses and Elijah.
  - c. Cloud.
  - d. Voice.
    - All rather mysterious.

B. Peter Wanted To Capture The Mystery.

1. Peter wanted:
  - a. To stay there.
  - b. To camp out.
  - c. To build three buildings.
    - One for Jesus.
    - One for Moses.
    - One for Elijah.

2. But how do you capture?
  - a. Glory of God.
  - b. Glimpse of heaven.
  - c. Mountain-top experience.
3. How do you capture all of that?
  - a. With a building.
  - b. Without destroying it.

## II. Lord Knows We Try.

### A. When I Visited The Holy Land In 1992.

1. I'm not sure exactly what I was expecting.
  - a. But one of the biggest surprises for me.
  - b. Church buildings that have been erected.
    - On almost every sacred site.
2. For example:
  - a. Nazareth.
    - Where the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.
    - #Announcing that she would be the mother of the Christ child.
    - Church of the Annunciation.
  - b. Bethlehem.
    - Where Jesus was born.
    - Church of the Nativity.
  - c. Mount of the Beatitudes.
    - Where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount.
    - Church of the Beatitudes.
  - d. Mount Tabor.
    - Which commemorates the Transfiguration.
    - Where Jesus told Peter not to build.
    - There are three buildings.
      - #Church of Elijah.
      - #Tabor Church.
      - #Crusader Abbey.
  - e. Garden of Gethsemane.
    - Where Jesus prayed that his cup of suffering be removed.
    - Church of All Nations.
  - f. Jerusalem.
    - Where Jesus was crucified and buried.
    - Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
  - g. Top of the Mount Olives.
    - Where Jesus ascended into heaven.
    - Chapel of the Ascension.
  - h. There are more. Many, many more.

3. Shaker and mover behind many of these churches.
  - a. Helena.
    - Mother of Emperor Constantine.
  - b. Prior to Constantine.
    - When the Romans still ruled Palestine.
    - Christianity:
      - #New-fangled religion.
      - #Its practice often condemned.
      - #Its converts often persecuted.
  - c. When Constantine became emperor.
    - Things changed.
    - He himself became a Christian.
    - Christianity became:
      - #Accepted.
      - #Acceptable.
  - d. Constantine's mother made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
    - Like Peter.
      - #She wanted to preserve what she experienced.
      - #She wanted to build buildings.
        - \*To commemorate significant sites.
          - + In the life and ministry of Jesus.
    - She became the driving force behind the construction of:
      - #Church of the Nativity.
        - \* In Bethlehem.
      - #Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
        - \* In Jerusalem.
      - #Others.
        - \*These churches have been:
          - +Built.
          - +Destroyed.
          - +Rebuilt.
          - +Remodeled.
          - +Expanded.
            - =Time and time again.
            - =Over the centuries.
        - \*Testimony to the Christian community's efforts.
          - +To capture.
          - +To preserve.
            - =Essence of Jesus' life in this world.

4. But how can you capture the mystery of Jesus with a building?
  - a. Church of the Nativity.
    - In Bethlehem.
    - Built over:
      - #Grotto.
      - #Cave.
    - \*Which is the traditional site of the birth of Jesus.
  - b. But today that cave doesn't look like a cave at all.
    - Marble floor.
    - #With a giant ruby.
    - \*Marking the spot where Jesus' manger was thought to be.
    - Ornate tapestries on the walls.
    - Gaudy lanterns hung all around the room.
  - c. I had a hard time imagining.
    - This was the place where Jesus was born.
    - Even though we sang Christmas carols (in October).
    - #I had little sense of the mystery of Jesus' birth in that place.
5. I had a much greater sense of the presence of Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.
  - a. Tiberias.
    - Only modern-day city on the Sea of Galilee.
    - We spent two nights there.
  - b. I was up before dawn each morning.
    - Still jet-lagged from our trans-Atlantic flight.
    - I got dressed.
    - I took my camera.
    - I went down to the beach.
      - #To watch the sun rise.
      - \*Across the lake.
      - \*Over the Golan Heights.
      - #There were fishing boats out on the lake.
      - That's where I had my mountain-top experience.
      - #"This is where Jesus was."
      - I tried to capture the mystery of that moment.
      - #With my camera.
        - \*I took pictures.
        - \*I had some of those pictures:
          - +Enlarged.
          - +Framed.
    - c. But if I were to show you my pictures.
      - You would likely be:
        - #Bored.
        - #Unimpressed.
      - Because how do you capture the mystery of God's presence?
        - #With a picture, any more than you can with a building.

B. We Keep Trying.

1. Most difficult days for me to preach.

a. Christmas.

b. Easter.

-How can I capture with mere words?

#Awe.

#Glory.

#Majesty.

#Mystery.

\*Of Jesus':

+Birth.

+Resurrection.

\*Beyond:

+Reading.

+Telling.

=Of the story.

-But I keep trying.

2. We put words to music.

a. Some people like:

-Certain songs.

-One style of music.

b. Other people like:

-Other songs.

-Another style of music.

c. Music that might capture:

-Awe.

-Glory.

-Majesty.

-Mystery.

#Of God.

\*For some.

\*Might do little or nothing for someone else.

-But we keep trying.

3. We have had four small-group sessions in our congregational renewal process.

a. Seeds for Growth.

b. Rekindle the Fire.

-We have more yet to schedule.

#To get your input.

\*Vision God is giving you.

+For our life together.

-I've attended three out of the four so far.

#Each one has been different.

-One of the things that has surfaced.

#Desire:

\*Capture.

\*Re-capture.

+Mountain-top experiences.

=Speak so powerfully to us:

-Spiritually.

-Emotionally.

-But how do we?

#Capture.

#Re-capture.

\*Mysterious way in which God becomes present:

+Within us.

+Among us.

\*With:

+Words.

+Music.

+Art.

+Program.

+Whatever else.

\*Without:

+Changing it.

+Destroying it.

### C. Maybe The Best We Can Do Is To Let The Mystery Be Mystery.

1. Sometimes we are like:

a. Moses.

b. Peter.

c. James.

d. John.

-In the cloud.

-On top of the mountain.

-In the midst of:

#Smoke.

#Fire.

#Glory.

2. Sometimes we are like the crowds of people.

a. At the foot of the mountain.

b. Observing:

-Cloud.

-Fire.

-Smoke.

-Glory.

#From a distance.

3. Sometimes we are like:
  - a. Peter.
  - b. James.
  - c. John.
    - Who have been to the mountaintop.
    - But who can't stay there.
    - Who are always on the way.
      - #Down the mountain.
      - #Into the valley.
      - #Up another mountain.
      - #Into the valley again.

D. Isn't That The Mystery Of Jesus Himself?

1. Who leaves behind the glory of heaven.
  - a. To be born in human form.
  - b. Is not this a mystery?
2. Who is declared to be the Son of God at his baptism.
  - a. Only to spend the next 40 days and 40 nights.
    - In the wilderness.
    - Being tempted by Satan.
      - #Next week's Gospel lesson.
      - \*Matthew 4: 1-11
  - b. Is not this a mystery?
3. Who shows us a preview of heavenly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.
  - a. But who then has to experience the humiliation of the cross.
    - On another mountain.
      - #Golgotha.
  - b. Is not this a mystery?
4. Who is buried in a tomb not his own.
  - a. But who is raised to life on the third day.
    - To make:
      - #Us.
      - #All the world.
      - \*His own.
  - b. Is not this a mystery?
5. Who has ascended back to heavenly glory.
  - a. But who keeps coming to us.
    - In water and the Word.
    - In bread and wine.
  - b. Is not this a mystery?

Concl: How do we capture the mystery?  
-We don't.  
-We can't.

Mystery captures us.  
-When.  
-Where.  
-How.  
#It will.

We believe it.  
-Glory.  
-Glory, glory, hallelujah.