

Jesus Only – July 7  
Mark 9:2-8

It's so easy for us to come down hard on poor Peter, isn't it? He always seems to have his mouth on fast-forward and his brain on rewind. But surely in this case we should cut him a little slack. After all, seeing Jesus transfigured in all His glory had to be a pretty mind-blowing experience, not to mention getting to meet two of the great heroes of the faith, Moses and Elijah, at the same time. It's no wonder Peter didn't really know what he was saying.

But maybe Peter was making some sort of sense after all. For when we are similarly overwhelmed, in the midst of the body blows life all too often throws our way, I think we can all sympathize with Peter's desire to build some tents and camp out up on the mountaintop. When we just can't figure out what our next step should be, or when chronic pain moves in to stay, or when waves of grief threaten to drown us, don't we all just want to hang out with Jesus, to be above all those problems? Don't we all want a little piece of heaven right now?

I suppose that's one reason we come to the Lord's Table – we want to get a taste of Jesus. We want to feel His presence. We want to have some reassurance of His love. But if we're not careful, we can bring with us the same sorts of unrealistic expectations that made Peter want to stay up on that mountaintop with those shining figures. And that means we will leave this table ultimately unsatisfied.

For think about what Moses represented to Peter. After all, Moses was the great lawgiver, right? If Peter could keep Moses with him, he'd never have to wonder about what was right or wrong. He would always be sure that he was doing exactly what God expected of him.

And that wasn't just a temptation for Peter. Even today people of many other faiths seek spiritual comfort in legalism, in the effort to earn God's favor by following a set of rules. And Christians are not immune from this problem. It's comforting to think that all we have to do to be good in God's sight is to avoid certain scandalous behaviors. It makes us feel good to look at spectacular sinners and say, "Well, at least I'm not like them!" And how many of us take pride in our good deeds, attending worship or helping the poor or showing kindness to strangers? Yes, it's all too easy to fall into the comfortable trap of legalism.

But none of our do's and don'ts have any place at this table – there's no room for legalism here. For here we come not to give but to receive. We come not to do something to earn our salvation, but to remember that Jesus has accomplished it completely. Here, we do not earn our wages. Here we simply receive the grace of God.

Of course, we might want to hang out with Moses for another reason. For in our increasingly confused and confusing world, with so many competing truth claims clamoring for our attention, when even those who call themselves Christians can't agree on what's right and wrong, it's hard to figure out exactly what God wants us to do. It would be so nice to have someone like Moses around so we could have a little moral certainty, wouldn't it? It would be nice not to have to do the hard work of studying God's Word, and trying to apply its principles to our current circumstances.

Well, if that's what we're looking for at this table, we won't find it either. For instead of certainty and understanding, here we face even more mysteries. How can God be Father, Son and Holy

Spirit all at the same time? How could the Son of God become a real, flesh-and-blood human being? How can eating a bite of bread and drinking a sip of juice draw us closer to Jesus, and how can He be spiritually present in these elements? There's a lot we don't know about Jesus.

But just as in so many other areas of our lives, we are not called to understand everything about Him. We are not called to live lives of certainty, lives where we are in control. No, just as Peter was eventually left with only Jesus, that's who we find on this table. Here, we are called to receive Christ alone, and on His terms.

But so often we want more, don't we? When our loved ones become sick, or when our finances are stretched too thin, wouldn't it be nice to have a miracle-working prophet like Elijah show up? After all, he made sure that a widow and her son didn't run out of oil or flour during a famine. Later on, he brought that same widow's son back to life. He even called down fire from Heaven to prove the existence and the power of God.

And wouldn't it be nice to tap into divine power whenever we want it? Isn't that the reason why so many people go to faith healers or listen to those who preach the prosperity gospel? Don't we all want God to meet our needs on our terms, according to our timetable? But just as the vision of Moses faded from Peter's eyes, so Elijah also departed from him. Eventually, he was left on the mountaintop with only Jesus.

And that's the same reality we face when we come to this table. I mean, there's really nothing here that's of any worldly good – a sip of juice won't keep any of us from wanting lunch today, and a bite of bread won't balance any of our budgets. And no, there's nothing miraculous about these elements, even after we've asked God's blessing on them. Just receiving them won't heal the sick, and they certainly won't guarantee salvation to those who partake of them. No, all we receive here is Jesus alone, as He is spiritually present in this bread and this fruit of the vine for those who trust in Him.

And so that's the question for all of us as we come to this table: are we satisfied with Jesus alone? Will we do His will, even when we don't understand it? Will we follow Him even if He doesn't give us any of the prosperity or health or happiness we crave? Will we be satisfied simply to know He has drawn near to us, that He lives within us? Will we trust Him if all He gives us is Himself?

So, if you want more of Jesus, then come to the table. For only Jesus is here. But the good news is that Jesus is all we need.