

“More Sure Witness”

2 Peter 1:16-21

Now that the Super Bowl is over, the sporting world shifts its attention. Here in Ames, while the basketball teams stumbled a bit earlier this week, there's still hope they'll go far in the tournaments. Outside of that, we turn our attention to baseball. Pitchers and catchers reported to spring training sites this week, and the big change this year is the addition of the so called robo-umpires, an automatic system that evaluates balls and strikes, along with an appeal process if someone thinks that the call was wrong.

The Super Bowl didn't have any controversial calls, but some earlier playoff games did. The NFL seems to still have a problem deciding when a catch is a catch and when it isn't, and when a play can be an interception ripped from the receiver's hands while he's on the ground, and when that doesn't work. Even when a play can be analyzed from multiple angles, even when you can zoom in and zoom out, rewind and fast forward, there can still be disagreement over what happened.

That expanded use of technology affects how we view most sports now. We depend on replays and videos to make sure the call is right, to see if we agree with what was called. Of course, the problem is we don't agree on what we saw, or what it meant. From the Super Bowl down to kids' sports, people will disagree on what they saw and what it meant, usually thinking that what they saw should go the way they want it to go, the way it would most benefit their team.

The halftime show did the same thing. How did you see it? Was it a joyful celebration of Puerto Rican culture, with dancing and singing and even a wedding? Or was it another halftime

show full of inappropriate lyrics and clothing and dancing? Or if you watched the alternate halftime show, was it a celebration of God and country? Or are you still wondering how Kid Rock's lyrics could ever be considered family friendly? Even if you saw the same thing, you might disagree about what it all meant. What was seen was determined by preconceptions.

When Jesus takes three disciples up a mountain, they get to be witnesses to something. Something spectacular. Something miraculous. They see Jesus with his face shining and his clothes glowing. They see him talking with Moses and Elijah. And they're told what they see and what it means when the voice of God comes from heaven.

Peter doesn't understand it when he sees it. He wants to build tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah to stay up on the mountain. But they can't stay. And even though they've seen something spectacular, something miraculous, they're not supposed to share it with anyone. At least not yet. "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells his disciples not to talk about what they've seen. At least, not yet. He wants them to wait until it's been fulfilled. He wants them to wait until his mission is accomplished. He wants them to wait until they understand what they've seen, and what it means.

When Peter reflects on it towards the end of his life, though, he knows what it means. From this point at the end of his life, Peter could look back on biblical prophecy, the predictions from the Old Testament of what the Messiah would do, and see looking back how it all made sense.

He could see how the Messiah had to come to suffer and die. He could see why the Messiah had to work that way, not in a triumphal way that he'd been expecting. He could see how

When Peter reflected back on what he'd seen and heard and experienced, he didn't put it down. But he let his readers, and us, know that we didn't need that. We might not go up the mountain and see Jesus shining. We might not see Moses and Elijah talking with him. We might not see the cross or the empty tomb. But we've got something more sure. We have the word.

The stories of Jesus, reaching something of a climax in the extraordinary revelation of glory at the transfiguration, means that one can now read the entire ancient Jewish scriptures knowing the end from the beginning, seeing with God given hindsight how everything worked together to get to the point of the story. Prophecy had shown that God's glory would be revealed, that the Messiah would come to save his people. But the coming of Jesus hadn't looked like they thought that it would. They needed Jesus' further clarification, further teaching, further words, to fully understand.

Peter holds firm to two things; the ancient scriptures and the newly revealed son of God. Until we see Jesus as he really is, we don't understand where the scriptures were pointing. And if we don't understand the scriptures, we don't understand or see the point of who Jesus was and what he did.

CS Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else." How we see the world changes when we start with God's word. How we understand our experiences changes when we start with God's word.

The written Word of God is "more sure"—reliable and accurate, trustworthy and true. Scripture is more dependable than personal experience or human wisdom. Scholars can tell us that we have more copies of older copies of the Bible than we do any other book by far. And when the copies are checked, there is almost complete agreement, with minor changes that don't affect the theology. With the Scriptures, you never have any doubt. The written Word is "more sure." It's tried and tested. It has stood the test of time. And you can always go back and reference Scripture.

Peter spent three years wandering around the Judean countryside with Jesus. He was right there with him on the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus' clothes flashed like lightning and Moses and Elijah appeared in glory having a conversation with him. And now Peter tells us that there's no better way to listen to Jesus than to pay attention to the Scriptures, the written Word of God. It's even better than being on the mountain with Jesus. It's even better than walking around with Jesus. It's even better than being a witness to the resurrection of Jesus!

Leonard Sweet writes "Experience is not the final arbiter of truth. Experience cannot be trusted except it has been transfigured by Scripture ... there comes a time when it's not time for experiences, but for obedience." God's Word is permanent. God's word transcends experience. God's word may be confirmed by experience, as happens to Peter, but it is never overturned by experience. Relying on our own experiences places us in the place of God. Relying on our own experiences make us the final arbiter of truth. That is why experience must be interpreted through Scripture, not the final, authoritative lens with which we read scripture.

That's why we always place the emphasis on God's actions. It's not about waiting for a blinding flash of light. It's not about waiting for God to appear in a burning bush. It's not about waiting for God to give you a mountaintop experience. It's not about us and our experiences any more than it is about a baby's experiences before baptism. It's about the sure promises of God. The sure promises of God that say "Jesus died for you" and "You are forgiven." When we hear those words, we are witnesses of the most powerful force in the universe; grace.

Because of those promises, we have a more sure word we can trust in not only while we wait for good experiences, but while we endure bad experiences. Just as good experiences can shape our beliefs about God, so can bad experiences. When sickness, depression, heartache, death come into our lives, we can become angry with a God who would allow such things to happen. We can withdraw from God, or feel that God has withdrawn his presence from us. God's promises, God's sure and certain word, gives us a foundation to build upon, to trust in no matter what else happens.

We crave experiences. More than that, though, we crave certainty. We crave something sure. We have been given that when we listen to the words of God heard by Peter on that holy mountain. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Along with Peter, James and John, and the whole company of heaven, we are witnesses of Jesus' glory.

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