



## “SOUVENIRS”

SCRIPTURE: 2 KINGS: 2: 1-12; MARK 9: 2-19

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE,  
NC

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### **Mark 9:2-9**

9:2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

9:3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

9:4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

9:5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

9:6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

9:7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

9:8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9:9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The Word of the LORD

**Thanks be to God.**

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My Great Aunt Elizabeth (Mary Elizabeth Mount) loved souvenirs. She had traveled a little in her life, but most of her souvenirs came from

people bringing things back for her collection. Spoons and bells were her biggest collections. But she loved little figurines of animals, too.

Spoons with the state bird, bells from the state capital. They were her connection to a big world she only knew a tiny part of—she never finished school high school. Since she was a girl, my great grand parents focused their energy on getting my grandfather through high school and then on to college and seminary.

She never married. With her brother, my grandfather, out in the world ministering, she was the one who needed to stay behind and care for their aging parents. She lived almost every one of her 90+ years in the same house in Franklin, TN.

It was a house full of memories, full of souvenirs—the bed where my great grandmother died peacefully; the mattress where my great, great grandmother hid her husband from Confederate soldiers. He had slipped away home to see his newborn baby. They searched the house but didn't find him between the mattresses.

It was a house full of Souvenirs of Holy moments and mysterious mercies, a house full of my Aunt's hopes to hold on to joy, delight, and wonders that were never quite hers.

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We can understand Peter's impulse in the Gospel of Mark's account of Jesus' Transfiguration. He wanted to capture the moment. He wanted to hold on to that rush, that experience, that moment like no other he'd ever had. What's so wrong about that?

The thing is, if we're honest about what is going on in this story about Jesus, then Peter's impulse is like a spiritual buzz kill.

It was an Ancient Near Eastern equivalent of taking a selfie during a mystical experience. You can imagine the caption: "just hangin' with my besties at the Transfiguration" #heardthevoiceofGodtoday #yesthoseareclouds #Jesusrocks #Godmoment (phone)

What is it about our human condition that makes mystery, that makes that which is outside the range of what we understand so hard for us to sit with for long? Anxiety? Ignorance? Denial?

Or is Peter, plain and simple, AFRAID? Afraid of what it could mean for his life if he was occupying such a thin space in the reality he had always known. This moment, this dazzling, brain scrambling, heart stopping moment, was also a threatening moment.

Perhaps Peter could feel his past slipping away from him—and an unknown future consuming him—perhaps it sunk in for a split second what following Jesus was really about—not just about leaving his job and his family, but about losing his life, about being in danger, about taking risks he wasn't sure he signed up for when he put his net down that day and said “sure I'll come along.”

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Elisha thought he wanted to be a part of Elijah's mystical moment—three times he responds to Elijah with “I will not leave you.” Three times to those warning him: “I know what is happening, be silent.”

His request to Elijah is “give me a double share of your spirit.” He was present to it—its power changed him, it made him tear his clothes: a gesture of mourning.

Elisha cannot un-see what he has seen—and his life will never be the same. In the verses following our passage for today we see that people around Elisha refuse to believe Elijah is really gone and search for his body for 3 days. But Elisha moves into his future as a prophet, taking up the mantle of Elijah in a tumultuous, unbelieving world. The lectionary doesn't often take us into how Elisha's career as a prophet unfolds into violence, and some would say abuse of the mysterious powers he has been given.

Holy Mystery is more powerful than our imaginations. And its life-giving, transformative intention can be fragile when shared with human beings. Elisha wasn't the first or last to abuse the power of Holy Mystery. How quickly human beings can distort the power of God with us as the power to play God, confusing spiritual power with things like

entitlement to someone else's body or someone else's resources or even someone else's relationship with the Divine.

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God is not a mystery to be solved or a truth to be settled or weaponized or a power to be toyed with or abused. When we reduce God to our understanding, we engage in a dangerous delusion. Life becomes about our grasping at things to control them and possess them, instead of an experience that feeds the flame of Christ within each of us.

Being a person of faith in this tumultuous world is about belief, not certainty. It is about mystery, not mastery. It is about trust, not control. Breathe that in for a minute—these are more than just words. These are dispositions toward human life that call on us to give ourselves to the world with such generosity, with such open hearts, with such confidence in God's transforming ways that we are willing to let go of the things we thought we needed to stay afloat.

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Souvenirs (go through box of souvenirs)

These were Holy moments, moments of grace, of transformation, of resurrection and healing, of joy and I thought I could capture them—hold on to them with these souvenirs. But, I look through these treasures and realize those experiences have faded into a past that has helped to form me, but a past that I can't hold on to the way I thought I could. And I am not sure what that means.

I was with my Aunt Elizabeth when she died. Had some of her favorite spoons and bells still around her. She was fighting death—somehow not ready to let go. It was painful to watch her struggle to breathe—as if she was holding on to a life that never quite measured up, never quite gave her what she hoped for. I kept tell her it was ok to go, but she wouldn't. Something made me pick up the picture and I held it in front of her face. I said, "Aunt Elizabeth, your mother and father are waiting for you. They want you to come now." And in that moment she breathed her last.

It was a Holy moment that I hope I will never forget— I saw her surrender to a peace that passes understanding.

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Presbyterians depend on a lot of words and thoughts to make us feel like we know God and understand God. But following Jesus is not as much about understanding as it is about surrendering. For a few minutes (not a few seconds) let us find the courage to let go of words and surrender to the Holy mystery of sacred silence.

Jesus following is something we have to learn to surrender to—by letting go of things we can't imagine living without...

(End with extended silence)