

“Extraordinary”

Mark 9:2-9

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When I was little, my dad was part of a recreational soccer league, with the games held at a park in our hometown of Coquitlam. And while he was playing on the field, my two older sisters and I would play on the sidelines, where there was this enormous rock. It was huge, big enough for all three of us to climb on and play on at once, along with some of the other kids whose parents were also in the game. This rock was amazing - it felt like something impossibly magical, too big to be real – like a giant had carried it from Narnia and left it behind by mistake, like you could build an entire fortress, an entire city, on this one, magical rock. And then a few years ago, while we were back in BC visiting family, I spent a day driving around my old home town, and I drove past that park for the first time in decades, and I saw the rock. And it wasn't quite as big as I remembered it. I mean, it was pretty big, as far as rocks go – definitely a largish rock. But mostly, it just looked ordinary. If I hadn't actively been looking for it, I would've never noticed it, and even when I spotted it, at first I thought that there must be another, more impressively large rock a little further down the field – surely that couldn't be the great monolith of my childhood memories. So I kept driving, and when I reached the end of the road and there were no other rocks, and I was forced to admit that my great, magical boulder was just a bit of granite poking out of a hillside, I was so disappointed I didn't even turn around to go back. It would've felt too anti-climactic to turn around and pull over and get out of the car just to sit briefly on this unimpressive, ordinary little rock and feel old, plus I would've had to explain the whole thing to Johanna who was already starting to wonder why we were aimlessly driving around the suburbs, so we just kept going. The rock wasn't magic anymore.

Now of course, that rock hasn't changed in the decades since I last played on it. It's still the same rock it always was, still identical to the way it was the day I climbed it for the first time. I'm just somewhat bigger, and a whole lot older, and a little less inclined to see magic and fantasy in otherwise ordinary things. The rock hasn't changed. I have. And maybe you've had

a similar experience – you’ve gone back to some place from your childhood, some place that once seemed magical and special and unique, only to discover that now it’s small and ordinary, now you see it for what it is, what it always was, because you’re older and wiser and different from who you used to be.

That’s how life usually works. We start out seeing magic and excitement and wonder everywhere, and then the trouble of life slowly bleeds that out of us, and before you know it all you’re seeing are the bills you have to pay and the errands you have to run and the obstacles in your path that are going to make your life more complicated. When you’re a kid, a thunderstorm is a highlight of the year – you stay up late, watching out the window, counting the seconds between the lightning and the thunder. When you’re old, you just hope the power doesn’t go out before you’re finished your TV show. When you’re sixteen, driving a car is exciting, exhilarating, this incredible achievement marking your transition into adulthood, but when you’re old, driving is just a chore, something you have to do to get to the grocery store and back as efficiently as possible. When we get older, the world doesn’t change, but we do – we get more skeptical, more cynical, more cautious, we lose our sense of wonder and amazement, we see everything around us as more and more ordinary.

That’s how life usually works. But sometimes, it happens in reverse. Sometimes, instead of starting out seeing the world as magical and special and coming to see it as ordinary, sometimes we think things are ordinary, unimpressive, small, and then we slowly start to realize that there’s something wonderful there we didn’t originally expect. Take, for example, our reading this morning from Mark chapter 9. There are 16 chapters in the gospel of Mark, which means this reading is pretty much right smack in the middle, halfway through the story of Jesus’ ministry between his baptism at the start and his resurrection at the end. And at this point, halfway through the story, the disciples are pretty sure they know who Jesus is. He’s an amazing teacher and preacher, someone who has authority over evil, disease, nature, even over death. Peter even declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the long-promised King who is going to defeat the Romans and establish a new, everlasting kingdom centred in Jerusalem. The disciples think they’ve got Jesus figured out, and they’re so confident in their opinion of Jesus

that when Jesus tries to tell them something that doesn't quite fit – that he's going to be killed, executed by his enemies, and then three days later come back to life – they won't listen. Peter even takes Jesus aside and tells him off for saying something so silly. The disciples are so sure that they know who Jesus is, that they understand Jesus, that he fits into their worldview, that he is someone they can predict and control – for all his amazing abilities, for all the things he's done, the disciples still see him as something fundamentally ordinary.

And then they go up the mountain. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up to the top of a tall mountain, and there, Jesus is transfigured – he is transformed. Suddenly, he isn't this ordinary-looking carpenter, a poor peasant preacher in dirty clothes and worn out sandals. Suddenly, he is extraordinary, glowing with brilliant white light, dazzling in its intensity. And he's standing with Moses and Elijah, the two greatest heroes of the people of Israel, two men who saw and talked with God face to face, and they're chatting with Jesus like he's an old friend. And then a voice comes from heaven, the voice of Almighty God speaks to Peter and James and John, and says – HEY!! Jesus is my son. My dearly beloved Son. Listen to him! In an instant, everything these disciples thought they knew about who Jesus is has been turned upside down and inside out – Jesus has been transfigured, Jesus has been transformed.

Or has he? All the way through the gospel of Mark, the disciples have been seeing Jesus as ordinary – a very capable person, a person with lots of potential, lots of power, but still just a person, and now that they've been to the mountaintop, now they see him for who he truly is – the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe incarnate in human form. But really, Jesus hasn't changed. The Jesus who went up the mountain is fundamentally the same as the Jesus who came down the mountain afterwards. He isn't any different. Go all the way back to the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark, to Jesus' baptism, and there, as Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River, a voice from Heaven speaks and says – Hey!! Jesus is my son, My dearly beloved Son, who brings me great joy. And a few verses later, when Jesus is preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, an evil spirit starts shouting – Jesus, I know who you are – you are the Holy One of God!. In Mark Chapter 3, it says that “whenever evil spirits caught sight of Jesus, they would cry out – you are the Son of God!” In Chapter 5, a man possessed by evil calls

him Jesus, the Son of the most high God. All this time that the disciples see Jesus as ordinary, all these evil spirits see him for who he truly is – when they look at Jesus, they see what the disciples saw on that mountaintop, Jesus dazzling bright, filled with divine power, not just a carpenter but the Creator of the Universe incarnate on earth. Jesus was the same person right from the very beginning of the gospel of Mark, so the real transformation that happened on that mountaintop wasn't in Jesus. It was in Peter, and James, and John. From that moment on, they can't look at Jesus the same way ever again. From that moment on, they see him for who he truly is, the Son of God, the word made flesh. And when they come down the mountain, back to the ordinary world, they come back changed men, as people who can suddenly see the world in a new way, as no longer ordinary, because if the Son of God is loose in the world, if the Holy one of God is here, then that changes everything. Suddenly everything that once seemed ordinary has the potential to be transformed, to be made new. The disciples were only seeing the world through jaded, disillusioned eyes, conditioned to see only the ordinary, only the predictable, only small things and small people, but now they come back down the mountain and see the world through child-like eyes, eyes that can see magic again, eyes that can see the wonder and possibility that comes when Jesus Christ, the living Son of God, is there in your midst.

And that is still true for us today. It is so easy to get so tired, so disillusioned, so jaded by the troubles of this world and the disappointments we've suffered. We think evil will always be with us, that injustice can never be changed, that the world is broken and will always be that way. It is so easy to see everything around us as ordinary, and to think that things will always be ordinary, that the hopes and dreams and magic that we expected as children are just passing fancies that we've outgrown. But when we know that Jesus Christ is with us, when we see him here in our midst, when the same man who walked through Galilee, who led Peter James and John up the mountain, the same man who hung from the cross and rose again from the grave, when Jesus Christ is here with us now, then there is no such thing as ordinary. When we see Jesus Christ, our eyes are transformed, our world is transformed, and we can start to see the world around us with child-like eyes once more, to see the extraordinary potential in this world and in our lives because the Son of God is here with us. This world is extraordinary because

Jesus is extraordinary, and Jesus is here in this world, right here with us, at work in us. And the only thing that can get in the way is when we think we know everything there is to know about who Jesus is, when we try so hard to convince ourselves that we're in control, that we've got it all figured out, that we know exactly what Jesus can and can't do, and he can't possibly do anything with us. Every day, again and again, we need to have our eyes opened, we need to climb that mountain again and again so that we can be transformed, so we can see Jesus Christ for who he truly is, so we can see the magic and the miracles and the new life that he wants to bring to us and in us and through us every single day. Because Jesus Christ doesn't change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The light and power that the disciples witnessed on top of the mountain, the light and power that followed them for the rest of their lives, that helped them transform the world, that same light, that same power, that same saviour is here with us now, ready to do extraordinary things in our world. Today, may we see Jesus for who he truly is – may we follow him wherever he goes – and may we be ready for the extraordinary work he will accomplish in us. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!