

The coffee shop was bustling but they had arrived early enough to get their usual seats. Customers came in to grab a cup to go; others peeked their head in and only committed once they saw a seat they could snag, and they marked their territory before heading to order at the till. The two of them enjoyed sitting by the windows to get the sunshine, but facing the room so they could people watch, imagining the other conversations couples and friends and even strangers were having. And in these seats they managed to make their plans and strengthen their relationships as they figured out life.

“I was thinking Mississauga or maybe Peterborough, honestly,” he heard her say. “I thought about Niagara but when I began looking it seemed like it would just be a little too expensive.”

“Of those options, Niagara is the only one that interests me even remotely. And besides, I was thinking somewhere maybe a little warmer. Really just get away from our regular experience and enjoy a change of pace. Florida? Even South America or somewhere in southern Europe.”

“You want to go that far? Wouldn’t being so distant from family make you feel uneasy?” she said. “What if something happened to your mom again and we had to rush home to take care of her?”

He looked at her funny, wondering how sick she thought his mom was. “We wouldn’t be gone forever.”

Her eyes widened, “I don’t want to throw all our stuff in a bag just to do it again in a year or two. That sounds horrendous, honestly.”

“A year or two? Honey, neither of us get that much vacation time. Max I could do is a month, and that’s if I tackle overtime.”

It began dawning on them both that they weren’t speaking about the same thing. She was carrying on a conversation they had been having the other day about moving, while he was jumping off of the conversation of the couple who had walked in talking about taking a cruise.

How often is this not the case, though? We’re speaking in the same conversation, yet because one person started in this place and another at this point, they are imagining something completely different. Or someone uses some tones or gestures to hint that they means something different than their words are saying, but the other person is a little dense so it goes right over their head. Or the two people speaking have very different values and assumptions about life and the world, so the two big pictures they’re holding and working towards are vastly different, but they haven’t quite made that clear yet so the conversation doesn’t really make sense to either but they can’t tell you why.

Peter had been listening to Jesus for years now but still hadn't quite heard Him; he knew what Jesus was teaching but couldn't fit all the pieces together so he tried to take what Jesus was saying and doing and run with it but he seemed to take it down the wrong path. 6 days prior, only one chapter earlier, Peter had, by some miracle of inspiration, proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He was beginning to see the whole picture, of Jesus being the chosen one who alone would fulfill God's will and save His people. Yet in the very next breath he is rebuked, called Satan for his next idea, for he could not comprehend that His Lord, the Christ, should suffer and that on a cross.

Yet Jesus doesn't forsake the bumbling disciple for his mis-aligned ideas of salvation, but instead Jesus invites the man 6 days later up to a mountain. He seems to be on his best behaviour today, for when the vision strikes and Peter sees Elijah brought down from heaven and Moses raised from the dead and Jesus in the middle shining in incomprehensible glory, all he does is want to honour the three remarkable figures and build them a place to rest, or stay.

Yet this innocent and earnest enough suggestion gets a response from the heavens above as God booms out, interrupting the disciple's words before he can go any further. The glorious vision of Christ illuminated like the Sun, standing between the prominent Old Testament figures, is hidden from view as a cloud descends and as God reminds the disciples, Peter first and foremost, to listen to Him.

"This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" the voice cries out from beyond what the human eye can see. If Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ just one chapter prior, the Father now confesses Jesus to be His one and only beloved. He is singular among all the rest of the heavens and the earth. He alone fulfills God's will; He alone is filled with, or consists of God's glory, as they merely glimpsed on this mountain top. He alone shares eternity with the Father, shares His essence with the Father, and He alone should be listened to just as the Father.

So if this glorious one is revealing that it is His purpose to die, then it must be. If He is going to leave this mountain top and head into Jerusalem where His enemies will seek His death and torture Him and He will give His last breath and His blood is shed, then it is best that we listen to Him rather than impose our own ideas or our own understanding.

Yet Peter would rather camp out in the glorious sight of Jesus, sitting around a fire with Him and Moses and Elijah and learn the wonders they can tell him. Can you blame him?

We all love what Christians have dubbed "mountain-top experiences," moments when God's presence, His power, His love are undeniable. It's why we're a little jealous

of the masses that got to eat of the unending loaves and fishes, why we wish we could be miraculously cared for like the handful of recipients of healings throughout the Gospels. It's why many pray for a sign whether to go this way, or for a feeling or a word to reveal God's will. We want Him and His glory to be obvious, undoubtable.

But that's not the God we get in the Bible.

We get a God that walks down into the valley, His glory eternally present but hidden under ordinary flesh and blood, present even in the midst of suffering. He leaves the glorious peak and enters into the valley of the shadow of death.

But He does that so that He may get us all the way through this land of darkness and death, of wanting and waiting. He doesn't simply snap us out of it, according to His will that not a single one of us can fully comprehend, but in doing it His way, we see that He isn't just able to steal us away from all that would want to harm us. No, He wins victory over them. He destroys their power, empties their threat, and assures us that, once we are on the other side of this journey of ups and downs, sin, death, and the devil will be no more.

The Christ, the Beloved Son of God, will not the easy route to power, but He seeks the road of long-suffering, and it's all in order to redeem those whom He loves. Though His glory is seen in plain sight for a moment on this mountain, His glory is enacted most of all as He continues to serve those battered down by a corrupt world, to give hope to those despairing, to sit with those that everyone else has given up on and moved on from, as He gives His last breath so all others destined to die wouldn't need to fear their last day.

And it is Jesus only, not Moses nor Elijah, but Jesus only who is able to enact such saving love.

And nothing has changed. The same saviour who walked straight into death's jaws, suffering it so that He might prove power over it after it had done its worst, He goes into a world broken and hurting and collapsing through His body today. You, Church, His hands and feet and lips, walk into a world that cannot save itself from its sin, that cannot preach to itself sure hope beyond today, that cannot bind up its own wounds nor calm its own fears, you walk into the valley of the shadow of death with your neighbours in order that they might know that Christ is with them as well.

And though we may not understand why Christ still works most gloriously in the midst of trials and tribulations, though we might not like that we are drawn into the midst of the pain of those around us, and even though our sinful selves resist this, even resent it on some days, it remains Christ's glory to work through us in this way, and even to carry us through bearing with others' burdens. Christ doesn't just dump us into the world to care for it, oblivious to the difficulties we will have as we give of ourselves to

others; no, He goes before us, bearing the brunt of the world's pains, He follows after us cleaning up the messes we've made, and He walks right alongside us down in the valley as we walk alongside others. And it is in these sacrificial moments that we truly learn patience and generosity, contentment and peace and even joy. It is here that we realize that we are not enough, but our faith grows because we learn to trust in Him as He proves Himself faithful, just as He promised.

So we can hope to go and serve in confidence, knowing we don't go on our own strength. But we give of our time to those who need an extra set of hands, we give of our money to those who need some food or gas, we give of our energy to those who need to be heard for the fifth time or to those whom we find ourselves praying for at 3am. We give of ourselves as the world needs, because Christ has given Himself completely for us.

I know that this doesn't always make the most sense, but that is why we are constantly told once against to listen. Listen to Him even though we can't see Him; listen to Him even if we can't understand the full picture; listen to Him because He is our only hope, and day by day we will understand and believe a little bit more.