

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, February 3, 2008
Rev. John Tapscott

“IT REALLY HAPPENED!”

2 Peter 1:16-18

Bill Hybels, the senior pastor at Chicago’s Willow Creek Church tells of a minister who had a spiritual awakening in mid career. Her preaching and teaching took on a more direct and apologetic and evangelical tone. This was quite new to the congregation who had been used to a different style of preaching. One Easter, this minister was preaching about the resurrection of Christ, and she laid out the solid historical evidence for the event. One seventy-five year old woman, a long-time member of the congregation, said to the minister after the service, “You mean the resurrection of Jesus really happened! I’ve never heard that before!” And the minister replied, “Yes, it really happened.”

The apostle Peter is saying something like this in the first chapter of his 2nd letter. Now he’s not talking about Christ’s resurrection, though he was well aware of the reality of that event, having been an eyewitness to the risen Christ and the empty tomb. No, in this passage, Peter is talking about Jesus’ transfiguration. We read of it in Matthew 17. Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain. They watched as Jesus was transfigured or changed before them. His face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light. Two other great figures of Israel’s history, Moses, the law-giver and Elijah, the prophet, appeared on the summit, speaking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “How lucky it is that we all here. I’ll make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. That way we can all spend some more time up here, listening to this marvellous conversation.” But it wasn’t to be. For as Peter was saying this, a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Now it seems that when Peter later talked about this event, some people said it couldn’t have happened. It must have been an illusion. The thin air up on the mountain must have played tricks with the disciples’ minds. So Peter says in 2nd Peter 1:16-18, ‘We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the majestic glory, “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we heard this voice borne from heaven for we were with him on the Holy Mountain.’ Peter is saying in effect, “Yes, it was a strange, once-in-a-lifetime event. But it is no myth; it really happened.”

I would like us to consider three implications that flow from Peter's insistence that "It is no myth; it really happened."

. First, it gives us confidence in the Biblical record and the prophetic word.

This event really happened, says Peter, because, "we were eyewitnesses. We were with him when this happened. And if you don't believe me ask James and John. They were there, too." And given the strangeness of the event would the apostles have made it up? This event is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, with the slight variations you would expect as the story was passed along verbally before it was written down. But the essence remains the same, just as it does for the Biblical record of Christ's resurrection. Then Peter applies this confidence to all of Scripture. Verse 19, "And we have the prophetic voice made more sure." By the prophetic voice, Peter is speaking of the Biblical witness to both past events and to what is to come. We can be sure of this witness.

The foundational events of our faith recorded in Scripture, God's calling and forming of Israel, the coming of Christ through Israel, his life, his works and teachings, his transfiguration on the mountain, his death, his resurrection, are not myths. They are real events. The salvation story is not based on philosophies or someone's inner experiences or the private visions of an individual in a cave. No, it's based on solid historical events, real events that were seen by those whom God had chosen as witnesses. More than five hundred people were witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Now not every part of the Bible is a historical record but even non-historical books like the Psalms are poetic and worshipful reflections on the character of God revealed in his real and mighty acts in history.

The Bible deals with real events and we can trust the historical record of these events. Peter is saying, "This is no myth. This really happened. We were there. We were eyewitnesses to his power and his coming and his majesty. We heard the voice on the Mountain. So when we tell you that he's coming again with power, as the prophets predict, you can be sure that will happen, just as the prophets were right when he came the first time."

That leads us to the second implication of Peter's declaration that "It is no myth; it really happened." *Because the Transfiguration really happened, we have to come to terms with it.* Verse 19 continues, "You will do well to pay attention to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

A central issue of our day is global warming. Now there is a debate about whether or not global warming is a reality, but I think it's widely accepted that the world is getting warmer. Any of us who have been around for forty or fifty years or more know that the climate has changed a bit from when we were younger. And once we've established and accepted that

global warming is not a myth but a real event then we have to pay attention to it. We have to come to terms with it and decide what to do about it.

So it is with Jesus' transfiguration. Because this is not a myth, but an event that really happened, we must come to terms with what God is saying to us through this event. Elijah and Moses were up there with Jesus. But when the presence of God overshadowed them, a voice came from the cloud saying about Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him." And at the end they lifted up their eyes and saw no one but Jesus only.

What God is saying through this event challenges our present-day culture and way of thinking. We live in a time when all claims to truth are all relative. What is true for me may not be true for you, but it doesn't matter - we're both right. It's a time of do-it-yourself spirituality when we consider all religions equal, blend this teaching with that one, pick and choose according to our own preferences. But God is saying through this mountain-top event, "Moses and Elijah are wonderful and you must honour them, ; in fact Jesus stands on their shoulders and fulfills their teaching. But Jesus is not just another great religious leader. Jesus is my beloved Son and at the end of the day he stands alone. You must listen to and follow him, and not anyone else." Peter says, "It is no myth; it really happened, and you must pay attention to it. You must come to terms with what God is saying to us and calling us to do through this event."

Finally, Peter's insistence that message, "It is no myth; it really happened," reminds us that something like this event still happens to us. Not just "it really happened, but it really happens."

Now we are not going to be up on a mountain-top as eyewitness to the transfiguration of Jesus. But Jesus can be changed before us too, transfigured, if you will. And it happens here in the community of Jesus as we hear his story from the Bible and look to him in faith and wonder. We begin to see him for who he really is, God's beloved Son, the fullness of God in human flesh, the suffering, crucified, risen and exalted Saviour of the world, the Source of forgiveness and eternal life, the coming judge and Lord of all, the One whom we can trust fully in life and in death, our Master and friend and strength. I knew from a young age growing up in church that there was something special about Jesus, but over the years my view of him has been transformed. And it's God's work, the work of the Holy Spirit. I see Jesus in a greater light and know him in a fuller way. More and more I realize how wonderful and awesome he really is. And I hope by God's grace this transformation really happens for each one of us. For the more we grasp the wonder of Christ and who he is, the greater is the hope and light we have to live by.

Something else happened for the disciples on the mountain that really happens to us. When Peter, James, and John heard God's voice they fell down on their faces, and were filled with fear. Now most of us will never hear God's voice in such a dramatic way. But there are things in life that quite literally drive us to our knees in fear and we've all been there one way or another - the diagnosis of a serious illness in ourselves or a loved one, a knock on the door at 2 A.M. as red lights flash in the driveway, driving on a slippery road in a sudden white-out, job loss or business failure, the thought of your sins separating you from God for eternity. But notice what happened to the fear-filled disciples, 'Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise and have no fear."'

So it happens to us when we are gripped by fear. It is a mysterious event, but it is very real. Somewhere, somehow, someone comes and touches you and takes away your fear. No matter how it happens and no matter who it happens through, you know that Jesus has passed your way. Whatever fears you bring with you today, be sure that Christ is beside you in these moments and will touch you as you receive this bread and cup. Listen with faith as he says to you quietly, "I am the Lord. I died for you and I live forevermore. I am with you. You belong to me and nothing will ever separate you from my love. Rise and have no fear. Then follow me to the place of faithful service." Friends, it is no myth; it really happened; it really happens, and it's really happening right now.

