



Perhaps you heard the story last week of Trenton McKinley, a 13-year-old young man from Alabama who suffered devastating head injuries in an accident. After being flown by helicopter to a hospital, doctors said his chance of survival was slim, as he had seven skull fractures, and at one point he flatlined for 15 minutes. The doctors told Trenton's family to prepare for the worst, and his parents signed the papers to allow doctors to donate his organs. Shortly after signing the papers, Trenton moved his hand. Then he moved his feet. Then he regained consciousness. Today he is walking, talking, and doing far better than anyone could have imagined. In an interview, Trenton said, *they (said) I'd be a vegetable. I don't really seem like a vegetable, do I?*

<https://www.today.com/video/-miracle-boy-trenton-mckinley-wakes-from-coma-just-before-organ-harvesting-1228102723830>

There is no shortage of those types of stories, with the label of *miracle* often attached to them. I find those stories fascinating, and one of the reasons why I do is because I see them as glimpses of eternity. I believe they are moments when God decides to pull back the curtain between heaven and earth just a bit, just enough to give us a glimpse of the reality of the eternal world.

This morning we conclude the series of messages titled *What Is It About Jesus?* In this series of messages I have traced the ministry of Jesus through various passages in the gospels and focused on those qualities of Jesus that attracted large crowds to him. Each week I have offered one word that demonstrated one of those qualities, and then used three other words that showed in detail how Jesus lived that particular quality.

Today the word we will consider is *eternity*. People followed Jesus because of his teaching, his love, and other reasons, but I believe that above all other reasons it was because of *eternity* and the demonstration of the reality of the spiritual world that drew people to Jesus. After all, if Jesus had been only a moral teacher we would likely never have heard of him. If Jesus had been simply a person who exhibited great love for people, we would likely never have heard of him. It was the fact that everything Jesus did and said was predicated on the reality of him as the living embodiment of God that guaranteed not only that he is remembered by history, but also that billions have been his followers throughout the two millennia since his life and ministry.

Our Scripture text comes from a well-known event as recorded in the gospel of Mark. The event is known as the transfiguration, that moment on the mountain when Jesus for a moment revealed himself

in his eternal glory to Peter, James, and John. I have preached on this passage a number of times over the years, but today I want to approach it from a different perspective. Instead of going into all the theological details about the meaning of the transfiguration I want to see it as a moment when a glimpse of eternity was revealed to Peter, James, and John. I don't know why those moments of eternity come when they come, and I don't know what causes God to bring them about, but I firmly believe there are those moments – moments more rare than we wish – when we get a glimpse into eternity, as God decides to peel back a bit the curtain that separates heaven and earth. In our modern, scientific, evidence-based world, I think we need these moments. We need these moments not so much as proof of God, but as a demonstration of what can be. So today, the three words that I will use to further define the word *eternity*, are *could*, *should*, and *will*. The glimpses that God gives us of eternity, such as at the moment of transfiguration, show us what *could* be, what *should* be, and what *will* be.

Follow along with me, then, as I read Mark 9:2-10 –

*2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.*

*3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.*

*4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.*

*5 Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”*

*6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)*

*7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”*

*8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.*

*9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

*10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.*

*Could.*

I don't know why Jesus selected only three of his disciples. Why was it only Peter, James, and John? I have no idea, except to wonder if it was for this reason – I think the glimpses that God gives of eternity tend to most often be somewhat small, that is, they don't involve a lot of people, but the testimony of those people becomes important. I think a glimpse still leaves room for faith, which is always important. Peter, James, and John were left with the task of telling the others what they had witnessed. That's the way those glimpse work; they happen to a few people – or just one person – and they are left to tell others, and we decide what we think about their testimony. We often want incontrovertible proof, but that is not conducive to faith. Hebrews 11:1 does say, after all, that *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*.

A glimpse, then, becomes a sort of role model, an example, a sign of what *could* be. We have plenty of examples, unfortunately, of what *is*. We see far too often the hatred and violence, the division and harshness, the greed and the envy, the tearing apart and rendering of the beauty of what God has created, which is all the more reason, then, of why we need a glimpse of what *could* be.

When I think of what *could*, be, I think of the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6:10 Jesus says *your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. When I read those words I hear all three as a reminder of what *could* be. As Jesus prayed those words he was saying God's will *could* be done on earth; that gives me great hope. In fact, it gives me more than hope; it gives me peace, confidence, faith, and so many other gifts as well. At a moment in history when there is so much that troubles us, where there is so much that makes us anxious, and so much that breaks our hearts, we need to hear a word from God – and we need to experience something from God – that will bring to us all that we need. I think

much of Scriptures are examples of what could be. From the beginning story of the Garden it is a glimpse of what could be. The message of the prophets was often what could be. The teaching and the parables of Jesus were examples of what could be. The stories of the early church were ones of what could be. And I hope in our time together, in what we experience together in worship, also gives us a glimpse of eternity, a glimpse of what could be.

### *Should.*

What *could* be is the vision, the example, the model of what *could* be. *Should* is the command. *Could* demonstrates to us the possibility, while *should* tells us that we need to get to work in order to make it so. It's as if God is saying, *I've told you and shown you what could be, now go and help to make it so.*

One of the reasons the *should be* is not always a reality is because it is not in the interest of those who profit and benefit from what is. The *should be* is a rebuke to the people, the principalities and the powers that seek to stand in the way of so much of what *could* be because it is not in their interest for it to become reality. Plenty of people benefit from what is, rather than what should be. When Jesus presents what *should be*, it is his way of saying that those who have benefitted from resisting what *should be* are put on notice. They have had their moment. In Jesus, God has shown what *should be*, and we will move toward what *should be* and will never go back to what *is*.

At the moment of transfiguration, Peter wanted to build some shelters and stay on the mountaintop and remain in that moment of glory, that moment of eternity. But then, just as quickly as the moment had come, it also passed. It was as though Jesus was saying, *now that you have seen what could be, now that you have seen what should be, go back down the mountain and make it happen.*

Every time we see a movement towards or a moment of equality, we are seeing what *should be* and we feel the pull toward what *should be*. Every time we see a movement towards or a moment of justice, we are seeing what *should be* and we feel the pull toward what *should be*. Every time we see a movement towards or a moment of freedom, we are seeing what *should be* and we feel the pull toward what *should be*.

This is what the *could* and *should* ought to do for us – they ought to move us towards making them a reality, because for some reason, God has left it to us to accomplish much of what *could* and what *should be*, because an important part of the process is not just that *could* and the *should* will happen; an important part of the process is that we get to be part of accomplishing those purposes.

Which leads us into our final point –

### *Will.*

Here's what's important to remember about the words *could* and *should* – they are conditional words. That is, they *might* happen. They *could* happen. They *should* happen. But *could* and *should* does not guarantee that they *will* happen.

That's why we have the word *will*. It is God's promise that all that *could* be, all that *should* be, one day *will* be. All that *could* be and all that *should* be become, then, not just a hope, not just a promise; they become a reality. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who are poor. To know that one day they not only *could* or *should* be lifted out of poverty; one day they *will* be. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who struggle to have adequate provision. To know that one day they not only *could* have or *should* have adequate provision; one day they *will* have adequate provision. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who long for freedom. To know that one day they not only *could* have or *should* have freedom; one day they *will* have freedom. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who are weary, for those who are worn down by the struggles of the world. To know that one day they not only *could* have or *should* have rest; one day they *will* have rest. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who struggle to have strength. To know that one day they

not only *could* have or *should* have strength; one day they *will* have strength. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who have been abused. To know that one day they not only *could* have or *should* have safety and shelter; one day they *will* have safety and shelter. The promise of *will* be is a powerful one for those who struggle with fear. To know that one day they not only *could* have or *should* have confidence and certainty; one day they *will* confidence and certainty.

One of the most amazing glimpses of eternity that I have known took place here in Shelbyville, at the hospital, over fifteen years ago. The glimpse began a few years before, in Baptist Northeast Hospital in LaGrange. One evening a member of our congregation was taken to the hospital after suffering a stroke. I sat in the hospital through the night with his family, and by morning it was clear that he was not going to survive and, sadly, he did not. He never regained consciousness, which greatly troubled his wife, because she said numerous times during that hospital vigil that there was so much she still wanted to say to him, and so much that she still wanted to hear from him. Many of the decisions she would be called upon to make in the coming days were ones that she felt she did not know what he would want, as they had never discussed such a moment. In the years after his passing she remained greatly troubled about all that was left unsaid. Then, about five or six years later, another member of our church was in the hospital here in Shelbyville. He continued to grow increasingly ill until he arrived at the point where his heart stopped, but he was resuscitated. Not long after his resuscitation, while he was still in the hospital, he said that he wanted to see the woman who had lost her husband. He had, he said, a message for her from her husband. Now, what was really interesting about the experience is that those two families were not really close friends. They knew each other, of course, but they weren't friends to the point that they spent time with each other and the man in the hospital would not have been aware of the worries and anxiety of the woman who lost her husband. She came to Shelbyville, visited him in the hospital, and left there a changed person. Whatever the message was, it lifted all the worry and anxiety from her and it was replaced with a great sense of peace. I really wanted to know what the message was, but I never asked her. Several years later I officiated at her funeral, and at the meal following her funeral I was sitting with one of her daughters talking about her life, and I finally asked, *did your mother ever tell you what the message was that she received from your father?* Her daughter said, *she never talked about it, but whatever it was it really changed her.* Whatever the message, I'm convinced it was a glimpse of eternity. It was a glimpse of eternity that gave her something she so greatly needed. It was a glimpse of what *will* be.

We know what *could* be, and we know what *should* be, but most importantly we proclaim what *will* be!