

Life is a balancing act...Teeter-totter... We are always trying to balance our debits/credits, our calories in/calories out, grace/truth. Cultivating a healthy spiritual life requires balance too. I want to take you to a passage this morning that highlights one of the most important balancing acts of all - the balance between worship and service. Let's get a running start. Turn to Mark 8...

8:1-9 – feeding of 4,000. Jesus demonstrates that the disciples already have what people need.

8:10-21 – the disciples still don't get the message.

8:22-26 – blind man can see Jesus but not clearly – sort of like the disciples.

8:27-30 – the doctrinal center of Mark's Gospel. Peter's confession of who Jesus is.

8:31-9:1 – Jesus tells them He must suffer and die. This is not what they want to hear.

9:2-13 – The transfiguration. Jesus takes three of His disciples on a prayer retreat. (Luke tells us he went up on the mountain to pray) The purpose of the retreat becomes obvious as Jesus undergoes a transformation while He is praying right in front of the disciples. They not only see Jesus in a new light but they get a foretaste of His glorious return.

Not only is Jesus transformed in front of them but Moses and Elijah show up...v. 4. Peter's response is true to form – the other two disciples are scared speechless...Peter speaks up!

“This is awesome Jesus. Let's make some of those little booths like we do for the Feast of Tabernacles and we can just stay up here on the mountain.”

A cloud comes over them and a voice speaks, “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.” Moses and Elijah disappear. Who needs the chief representative of the Law and of the prophets when the Lord Himself speaks?

Peter carried the experience on that mountain with him the rest of his life? In fact, 30 years later as Peter realizes his time on earth is short, looks back to this experience to affirm the second coming of Christ. **2 Pe. 1:16-18** “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales 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 honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased.’ And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

He could have referred to his experience with Jesus after the resurrection but even then Jesus did not reveal His majesty like He did on the mountain that day when Peter was a young man. Have you ever had a mountain top experience? Have you ever experienced a moment of clarity that was hard to explain when you sensed the presence of God? These experiences are glorious, even necessary, but fleeting. Worship is more than a feeling or an experience. It is also an act of obedience. So they come down from the mountain and enter the valley of reality...9:14-18.

When Jesus and the three disciples rejoin the other nine they encounter a chaotic scene. A desperate father brought his epileptic son to Jesus because He had nowhere else to go. Jesus was not there but nine of His disciples were. They had been given authority to cast out demons (3:15). They failed to heal the boy but ended up arguing with the religious leaders. This would be humorous if it wasn't such a familiar scene. Many of us have been in churches where people spent more time arguing about worship styles and church programs than actually helping anyone. The needy are ignored while church members bicker and complain about their

petty preferences.

Sometimes we just don't know how to help. So often I feel just like the disciples. Every week people come in here desperate for help. A lady threw herself on the floor and cried out to Jesus. I wasn't sure what to do. I thank God for Yanni Matus and Cindy Haas who ministered to that troubled lady. Later in the same service a man who is unfamiliar with not only what we believe but how we worship. He walked in during the message and headed straight for the front. It wasn't the first time. I spoke to him during the service and asked him to stay seated until the service was over. As you might expect a lively dialogue followed that service. "You shouldn't have done that. I'm so glad you did that. Do we have proper security? Can someone help that man?" Do you know what troubles me most? I didn't know how to help these people. But I do know this. We do have access to what they desperately need...9:19-27.

Later the disciples asked Jesus why they failed...9:28-29. When He says, "This kind can only come out by prayer," He isn't referring to some magical incantation used to cast our demons. In fact, the account makes no mention of Jesus praying. What Jesus is referring to is maintaining a close and enduring relationship with God the Father. The disciples are just like we are. They are familiar with failure, often embroiled in controversy and contentious disputes, undisciplined in their prayer life and more eager to learn the latest techniques or keys to success than to take the time to walk closely with God. They felt that Jesus had imparted to them some technique or spiritual power that they could control. Without Jesus they were powerless to serve. So are we. Even worship services are not used for the purpose of surrendering to the power of God and the will of Jesus but as a tradition practiced by a sub-culture quickly disappearing in our country where we see our friends and get a little reinforcement for our particular world view. And, if we're lucky, we'll get a few pointers on how our comfortable lives can be even more comfortable.

I want my priorities to line up with Jesus'. Just think of how the disciples were often searching for Jesus and found Him praying. Their agenda was different from His. Even in the final hours of Jesus' life He asked the disciples to pray and what did they do? They fell asleep. Surely one of the lessons in this episode is the futility of trying to serve Jesus in our own steam with our own power. Any power we possess grows out of our dependence upon God. We declare our dependence through prayer. That's what we are going to do this morning...