“GET UP AND …”

THERE ARE MANY FAMILIAR PHRASES THAT INCLUDE THE WORD “AND” THAT WE CAN EASILY COMPLETE.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF ASKED TO COMPLETE THIS ONE – “FOUR SCORE AND …,” YOU WOULD IMMEDIATELY SAY “SEVEN YEARS AGO.”

HERE’S ANOTHER ONE – “LIFE, LIBERTY, AND…”

“…THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.”

EVEN IN THE BIBLE WE HAVE SUCH STATEMENTS.

“…BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND…”

“…THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

HOW ABOUT THIS ONE – “SO FAITH, HOPE AND…”

“…LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE.”
ALL OF THOSE ARE EASY BECAUSE THEY’RE SO FAMILIAR TO US & THE ANSWER SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE ONE TO GIVE.

THERE IS SUCH A STATEMENT IN THIS PASSAGE WE’VE READ THIS MORNING, THOUGH, FOR WHICH THE ANSWER MIGHT NOT SEEM QUITE AS SIMPLE.

THIS IS THE STORY WE KNOW AS THE TRANSFIGURATION AND THERE IS PERHAPS NO STRANGER STORY THAN THIS IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

EVEN THE WORD ITSELF IS STRANGE.

WHEN HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OR USED THE WORD “TRANSFIGURATION” EXCEPT IN REFERRING TO THIS PASSAGE & THIS EVENT?

I THINK THAT, IN ITSELF, TELLS US HOW VERY STRANGE & HOW UNIQUE THIS EVENT IS.

IT VIRTUALLY DEFIES EXPLANATION.
I think that may be part of the point of it.

We aren’t called to explain it or understand it, but rather to try, as best we can, to determine how it might speak to our own lives.

One place in the story that we might be able to do that is with the “and” statement that is found here in words that Jesus addresses to those who accompany him on that mountain.

They are the only words spoken by Jesus on the mountain.

He instructs the three disciples – Peter, James & John – not to breathe a word of this until later, but that instruction isn’t on the mountain.
IT’S AS THEY’RE ON THEIR WAY DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN.

Peter speaks on top of the mountain – making his bizarre suggestion that they build three tents or booths or dwellings while they’re up there.

God speaks - in words that sound very much like the words we heard spoken at the baptism of Jesus.

But the only words we hear from Jesus are words that give us one of those connecting “and” statements.

He says to the three disciples, “Get up and…”

This one isn’t as simple as the previous ones I mentioned, is it?
IF YOU DIDN’T HAVE IT RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU, YOU MIGHT THROW OUT ALL SORTS OF SUGGESTIONS UNTIL YOU GOT IT RIGHT.

THE CORRECT ANSWER, THOUGH, IS REALLY ONE THAT SHOULDN’T BE THAT DIFFICULT, BECAUSE WE CAN NARROW IT DOWN BY THINKING OF THE THINGS THAT JESUS FREQUENTLY SAID.

ONE OF THOSE THINGS IS SOMETHING WE’VE TALKED ABOUT WITH GREAT REGULARITY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS & IT HAPPENS TO BE THE RIGHT ANSWER IN THIS CASE.

MATTHEW SAYS, “...THEY FELL TO THE GROUND AND WERE OVERCOME BY FEAR. BUT JESUS CAME AND TOUCHED THEM, SAYING, ‘GET UP AND...DO NOT BE AFRAID.’”

HERE IT IS AGAIN.
“DO NOT BE AFRAID.”

WHY WERE THEY AFRAID?

APPARENTLY, FROM THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE, IT’S BECAUSE THEY HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD SPEAKING TO THEM.

LISTEN TO IT AGAIN – “...SUDDENLY A BRIGHT CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THEM, AND FROM THE CLOUD A VOICE SAID, ‘THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED; WITH HIM I AM WELL-PLEASED; LISTEN TO HIM!’ WHEN THE DISCIPLES HEARD THIS, THEY FELL TO THE GROUND & WERE OVERCOME BY FEAR.”

THERE ARE A COUPLE THINGS HERE WORTH MENTIONING.

ON THE ONE HAND, WE MIGHT BE INCLINED TO WONDER WHY THE DISCIPLES WOULD BE SO AFRAID WHEN THEY HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD.
I MEAN, HOW GREAT IS THAT!?

YOU’RE HEARING GOD SPEAKING TO YOU!

AND HE’S TELLING YOU THAT JESUS IS, IN FACT, HIS SON!

BUT, LET’S FACE IT – IF YOU WERE TO HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCE – “SUDDENLY, A BRIGHT CLOUD Overshadowing you & a voice from that cloud speaking to you...” you’d probably drop to your knees in fear, too, wouldn’t you?!

BUT I THINK PERHAPS THERE’S SOMETHING MORE THAT WE CAN EXPLORE AS THE SOURCE OF THE DISCIPLES’ FEAR.

IT’S CONNECTED TO THE LAST WORDS SPOKEN BY THAT “VOICE FROM THE CLOUD.”

“LISTEN TO HIM.”
TO UNDERSTAND WHY THIS MAY HAVE FILLED THE DISCIPLES WITH FEAR, WE HAVE TO GO BACK A CHAPTER & PUT THIS EVENT IN CONTEXT.

AT THE END OF CHAPTER 16 – ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHAPTERS IN MATTHEW’S ENTIRE GOSPEL – WE HEAR THIS – “FROM THAT TIME ON, JESUS BEGAN TO SHOW HIS DISCIPLES THAT HE MUST GO TO JERUSALEM AND UNDERGO GREAT SUFFERING AT THE HANDS OF THE ELDERS AND CHIEF PRIESTS, AND SCRIBES, AND BE KILLED, AND ON THE THIRD DAY BE RAISED….THEN JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, ‘IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWERS, LET THEM DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME. FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO SAVE THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT, AND THOSE WHO LOSE THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE WILL FIND IT.’”
WHEN THAT “VOICE FROM THE CLOUD” SAYS “LISTEN TO HIM!,” THESE ARE THE LAST WORDS THE DISCIPLES HAD HEARD FROM JESUS.

THEM DON’T WANT TO LISTEN TO THAT!

THAT’S WHY PETER WANTED TO STAY ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN.

THAT’S WHY HE WANTED TO ENTER INTO A BUILDING CAMPAIGN.

LET’S FACE IT – BUILDING TENTS AND BOOTHS AND DWELLINGS FOR MOSES, ELIJAH & JESUS WOULD TAKE A WHILE AND THEY COULD JUST STAY WHERE THEY WERE AND AVOID ALL THAT TALK ABOUT JERUSALEM AND DYING AND LOSING THEIR LIVES.

THE SAME IS TRUE FOR US, ISN’T IT?

WE’D RATHER STAY WHERE WE ARE BECAUSE IT’S SO MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE.
WE’D RATHER STAY IN THE SAFETY & SECURITY OF WHAT’S KNOWN THAN VENTURE OUT WHERE THE ROAD MIGHT BE ROCKY & THERE MIGHT BE PITFALLS AROUND EVERY CORNER.

THE FUTURE IS FRIGHTENING WHEN WE DARE TO VENTURE INTO THE PLACES TO WHICH GOD IS CALLING US TO GO.

I CAN’T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT THE RELEVANCE OF THIS PASSAGE & THIS MESSAGE ON THE VERY DAY THAT WE BID FAREWELL TO EMMA SUE AS A STAFF MEMBER HERE.

IT APPLIES TO HER PERSONALLY & IT APPLIES TO ALL OF US AS WELL.

IT WOULD BE SO MUCH EASIER FOR HER TO STAY HERE & CONTINUE ON AS OUR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DIRECTOR.
IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR HER AND CLEARLY SO
MUCH EASIER FOR US.

IT WOULD BE EASY TO STAY ON THAT MOUNTAIN.

BUT GOD IS SPEAKING – TO HER & TO US.

GOD IS CALLING HER, CHALLENGING HER,
DARING HER TO STEP OUT INTO A NEW FUTURE THAT HE’S PREPARED FOR HER.

SURE IT’S SCARY BECAUSE IT’S SO UNKNOWN.

IT’S SCARY FOR US AS WELL FOR PRECISELY THE SAME REASON.

IT’S SO UNKNOWN.

WHAT WILL SHE DO? WHAT WILL WE DO?

FOR THE DISCIPLES, THEY HAD ALREADY BEEN TOLD THAT THERE WOULD BE DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD OF THEM.
BUT THEY WERE ALSO TOLD SOMETHING BETTER, SOMETHING BRIGHTER STOOD BEFORE THEM.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THEY WERE TOLD THAT THEY WOULDN’T BE ALONE AS THEY VENTURED INTO THAT FUTURE.

SO, TOO, FOR EMMA SUE AND SO, TOO, FOR US.

GOD HAS ALREADY PREPARED FOR US A FUTURE AND GOD WILL WALK WITH US INTO THAT FUTURE.

WHEN I LOOK AT THAT STATEMENT OF JESUS TO THE DISCIPLES – “GET UP AND…” – THERE’S ANOTHER THOUGHT THAT COMES TO MY MIND – ANOTHER WAY OF COMPLETING IT.

I HAVE TO PREFACE THIS BY SAYING THAT I HAVE A TENDENCY TO CONNECT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES & PREACHING THEMES TO SONG TITLES.
WHEN I READ SOME PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE, OR THINK OF PARTICULAR PREACHING THEMES, A SONG WILL COME TO MIND.

HERE’S A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON A SONG THAT CAME TO MY MIND WITH THIS STATEMENT OF JESUS TO THE DISCIPLES.

A YOUNG MAN NAMED NICHOLAS SAYS, “I WENT TO A PARTY & I WAS AT THE BAR AND IT WAS TAKING FOREVER TO GET A DRINK. I WAS FRUSTRATED AND COMPLAINING BECAUSE THERE WAS GREAT MUSIC PLAYING AND I WANTED TO BE OUT THERE. AND THEN MY GIRLFRIEND CAME UP TO ME…”

AND WITH THAT, A SONG WAS BORN THAT I THINK OF WHEN READING THIS COMMAND OF JESUS TO THE DISCIPLES.

WITHIN THE SONG ARE THESE WORDS:
“DON’T YOU DARE LOOK BACK, JUST KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME… SHE SAID, ‘SHUT UP & DANCE WITH ME.’”

OKAY, SO WE TELL OUR KIDS NOT TO SAY “SHUT UP!”

BUT CAN YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I THINK OF THESE WORDS IN LOOKING AT THIS PASSAGE?

PETER SAYS, “JESUS, WHY DON’T WE DO THIS? WHY DON’T WE PITCH A COLORFUL TENT OVER HERE FOR MOSES. AND THEN WE CAN CONSTRUCT A NICE, SOLID BOOTH OVER ON THIS SIDE FOR ELIJAH. AND WHEN WE FINISH WITH THAT, I’VE GOT IN MIND THIS FABULOUS DWELLING ON THIS CORNER OF THE MOUNTAIN FOR YOU AND…”

AND JESUS INTERRUPTS HIM AND SAYS, “DON’T YOU DARE LOOK BACK – JUST KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME. SHUT UP & DANCE WITH ME.”

“GET UP & DO NOT BE AFRAID!”
WE’RE ALL THERE ON THAT MOUNTAIN WITH PETER, JAMES, JOHN & JESUS.

WE DON’T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR US.

WE DON’T KNOW HOW ROCKY THE DAYS AHEAD MIGHT BE.

WE DON’T KNOW WHAT PITFALLS MIGHT STAND IN OUR WAY.

BUT WE DO KNOW THAT WHEN WE DESCEND FROM WHATEVER MOUNTAIN WE’RE NOW OCCUPYING, JESUS IS GOING TO GO WITH US.

WE CAN’T LOOK BACK TO THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE.

WE CAN’T BE OVERWHELMED BY THE DIFFICULTIES WE SEE BEFORE US.
WE CAN’T WHINE & COMPLAIN ABOUT THE FEARS THAT THREATEN TO UNDO US.

JESUS SAYS TO EVERY ONE OF US, REGARDLESS OF OUR LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES – “OH, DON’T YOU DARE LOOK BACK – JUST KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME.”

HE SAYS, “GET UP & DON’T BE AFRAID. SHUT UP & DANCE WITH ME.”

AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE, WHO COULD ASK FOR A BETTER DANCE PARTNER THAN JESUS? AMEN.

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