

Few things bring Americans together with more religious fervor than the Super Bowl. This afternoon families and friends will gather across the nation to cheer The Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers, who will compete in the 2024 Super Bowl. It is entertainment, pure spectacle. While I wouldn't consider our readings today entertainment, there is certainly a degree of the spectacular in them!

We witness with Elisha, the whirlwind and fiery chariot whisking Elijah into the heavens. Elisha grieves the loss of his teacher and friend and yet is empowered to go on. The transformed, transfigured Elisha will pick up Elijah's mantle that has fluttered to the ground. He will strike the water with it, pass through, and journey on. It is a welcome reminder to us that the ministry we exercise is not ours but God's.

After describing Jesus' trek up the mountain with Peter, James, and John; after trying to capture the appearance of Moses and Elijah; after working through Peter's good intentions and lack of understanding; after reporting the interruption and instruction of the divine voice... After all this, Mark reports simply, "As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead."

What I think is so significant about this little verse, and easy to overlook, is that it reports after all of what happened on the mountaintop..., *Jesus came back down*. Down to where the rest of the disciples are, down to where we are, down to the challenges of life "here below," down to the problems and discomforts and discouragements that are part and parcel of our life in this world. Down to the crucifixion. Jesus orders them not to tell anyone "until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead." Resurrection, of course, is a hopeful note, but it does not just imply, but pretty much necessitates, death!

Jesus came down. He didn't just go up the mountain of revelation or inspiration, but *came back down* again. This is more or less what happens in the Nicene Creed, as well. After all the fourth-century, Greek philosophical language trying to explain the mystery of the Incarnation, the Creed also gets to that same simple and crucial statement: "And for us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven."

This is, I think, the heart of the Christian faith. God in Christ came down to be with us and for us, to take on our life and our lot that we might not simply persist, but flourish, not simply have life, but have it abundantly, that we might understand that the God who created and still sustains the vast cosmos not only knows that we exist, but cares. Cares about our ups and downs, cares about our hopes and disappointments, cares about our dreams and despair, cares about all the things we care about, promising to be with us, to walk alongside us, to never, ever let us go, and in time, redeem us and bring us into the company of saints.

This gives us something to tell all whom we meet: that they are never alone. That God in Jesus sees them as worthwhile, as worthy of love and dignity and respect. God intends to use your gifts to care for each other and the world. God loves you...and loves your neighbor as well. God will not give up on you. Ever. Because Jesus came down. For us. In love. And for good.

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St. Thomas' Church, Camden, Maine