



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

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Transfiguration of Our Lord: March 3, 2019

Sermon Title: "When Glory Comes"

Gospel Text: Luke 9:28-36

Does anyone else wonder how the disciples can seemingly sleep through Jesus being transfigured on the mountain? Some people can. I swear my husband Michael had the capacity to sleep through every major mid-night crisis when our girls were young. What a gift! I think instead, maybe the disciples are overwhelmed. Peter, James and John, the first three disciples called by Jesus in Luke who left their boats and followed, have been on a wild ride, following Jesus as he is healing and teaching and trekking all over Galilee. They've attended dinner parties, but sometimes had to glean the fields for leftovers to eat too. They've encountered fears and rejections, and been exposed to leprosy. And it takes time for Jesus to get up to his full staff of 12. They've had to manage the crowds when Jesus healed everyone who came from not only Galilee but the whole region. Jesus has raised a boy and a girl from the dead and healed a demon possessed man. They had to figure out how to feed 5,000. Then there was the time they almost drowned in the storm. There are always crowds pushing in on them, so much so that even when Jesus goes away to pray, he gets interrupted with "Hey, people are looking for you." After this fast paced on the job training, Jesus sent them out in pairs to continue to cast out demons and cure diseases and preach. But they go with no food or money, or even a change of clothes. Sent not only to places that might welcome them, but to those where the door was slammed in their faces. And now, Jesus asks Peter, James and John to climb a mountain to pray with him. Anyone else ever close their eyes to pray and...?

Have you ever been so tired you can barely function? Or so busy and distracted you're just trying to keep up? Of course we have. Our translation says that since they stayed awake, the disciples saw Jesus, but the original Greek says it was "as they became fully awake." Which suggests that they were NOT fully awake to start. This moment on the mountain must have been so odd to wake up to as Jesus is praying and his clothes become as bright as a flash of lightning!

Peter and his companions are slumped over, but as they wake, they can't quite take it in. Something happened, but what really? Jesus "changed."

Maybe the true image of God shone through in a way the disciples managed to miss most days. Luke makes it clear that they simply had not been paying that much attention: The disciples have been weighed down with the kinds of cares that keep them from seeing clearly what is right before their faces. If it took the dazzling transfiguration of Jesus before their very eyes to wake these apostles up, what will it take for us to see God's presence in our lives? Especially in the faces of not only of those we know, but of "the other?" What are the signs of glory in our world that we regularly overlook because we are simply too weighed down with other things?

We can often miss seeing Christ in the world, including seeing Christ in each other along the way. There are peak experiences in the spiritual life. They happen when God wants them to happen, when God's grace descends on us as it wills. These spiritual highs come and go, but the real spiritual life is lived in the ordinary day-to-day with occasional glimmers of glory. Even for Jesus. In chapters four through eight of Luke, Jesus goes off alone to pray five times. The first was the temptations in the wilderness, pretty much a "low". Four other times Jesus goes off to pray, and each time nothing special happens. Jesus is just going about his business of preaching and teaching and healing, worship and prayer. This was his life; long periods of ordinariness with only an occasional moment of luminosity (Delmer Chilton).

We often struggle because our lives are so cluttered, or because there are stretches of life where it just seems perhaps so ordinary. We can be slow to grasp the presence of God in the world and in each other. Scripture assures us that we were all created in the image of God, bearing Christ. But what about as we hustle past people on the street, especially when all the students are here? Or when someone pushes past you to the next cashier at the Target? Or when we get jostled on the CATA bus, and we get annoyed with them when people crowd us? We can miss it, but Christ is being made known to us- Glory comes. Luke shows us the glory of the Transfiguration, but also points us all the way to the cross where the disciples will have been unable to stay awake and pray in the garden with Jesus- clearly a "low."

Luke will also tell us of the disciples walking on Emmaus Road where they somehow don't recognize the risen Christ on the way on an ordinary day. Until it becomes clear in the breaking of the bread. Luke is the only gospel that gives us all three of these stories. Highs, lows and ordinary. Glory and sacrifice. These reflect our life.

In the midst of all the changes, what abides? The transfiguration assures us that the glory on the mountain will continue to illuminate us everywhere we go. Jesus's glory on the mountain is not just a shining moment for Jesus, but what that light illuminates the holy in our world- there Glory comes.

Frederick Buechner suggests there are moments of transfiguration in all our lives. On the mountain, the disciples saw “the holiness of (Jesus) shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded. Even with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking his child in the park, or the person moved by listening to a concert, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in...which is where we wish were right now.” I’ll tell you where I see it most clearly here at Grace- in the faces of our youngest when they cradle their hands to receive the bread of the sacrament with all the joy and hope and light imaginable. These moments of communion can move me to tears. “Every once and so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing.”

God tells us to look it- for when God’s glory comes- the holy amidst the human. The more we look for it, the more we will experience it. Even in the unexpected. Then we can see the true image and glory of our siblings as Christ sees them. As we come away still carrying those moments, God tells us to listen to Jesus, down the mountain into the ordinary and the valleys of our shared life of holiness and human-ness. Notice that God is not calling us to just praise Jesus, but to listen to and follow his path- the one that reveals that when glory comes most clearly, it will be seen on a cross for the sake of the world. In Jerusalem, Jesus the Christ lives out his mission to sacrifice, to love to heal and to save all humanity.

And we follow in his path.

What sustains us as we follow is to pray, as Jan Richardson writes,

“That when glory comes,
we will open our eyes
to see it.

That when glory shows up,
we will let ourselves
be overcome
not by fear
but by the love
it bears.

That when glory shines,
we will bring it
back with us

all the way, all the way, all the way down.” (Jan Richardson, “When Glory” from *Circle of Grace*)