



GLIMPSES OF GLORY

February 11, 2018, Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday

Mark 9: 2-9

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Today is the second in a sermon series, “God on the Move in the Gospel of Mark.” Over the course of these three weeks we will consider what this portrayal of God in motion has to teach us about how to be faithful. Last week we heard how, after a day of Jesus healing people and becoming surrounded by an adoring crowd, he disappeared on the disciples in the darkness to pray. If the disciples want to remain with Jesus, they must join him on the move, ever onward to a vision they are not capable of completely comprehending.

Today we get another story of the disciples watching Jesus in a dramatic high point. Jesus drags Peter, James and John up a mountain. Just six days prior he had passionately told them about the suffering and death that awaited him on the end of their journey. He has basically pressed their faces against the reality of how completely mortal he truly is. And then, bam!, he lights up like a Christmas tree on steroids. And Jesus is joined by two of the highest and holiest of the Jewish pantheon, Moses and Elijah. The only thing missing is a Broadway style sign announcing they are in the presence of God Almighty and the Brick Church choir singing the Sanctus.

Glory be to thee, O Lord most high! I am sure Peter and James and John were mesmerized, transfixed, overwhelmed by the spectacle before them. And Peter says exactly what I would have said. Life is pretty good right here on the mountaintop, Jesus. Let us set up camp in the midst of all of this glory and enjoy it. Down the mountain there is all of that talk of suffering and death. Why would we ever leave all of this for that? I can have some tents up in a jiffy.



Before Jesus can respond there is a voice from above, “This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him!” And then all of the glory was gone in a flash. The disciples found themselves face to face with the normal, dusty from the road, Jesus, all by himself. And he is directing them back down the mountain to where all of the suffering and death awaits. And what’s more, he is telling them to tell no one of this glorious experience, which illuminated who Jesus truly is. I would have to say God was pretty smart to offer those commanding words of listening to Jesus to them. Because if I am one of those disciples the last thing I want to do is listen to Jesus right now. I want stay on that mountaintop. I want to stand there and call back that glory. I want to call out to Moses and Elijah, and the entire heavenly host. Let’s have a party right here for all of eternity. But the only way to remain in Jesus’ presence is to follow him back down the mountain, back on the dusty trail, heading to Jerusalem and in the end, the cross.

That is just not how I want it to be. The way I would like the universe to operate is that the more faithful I am, the better job I do of staying close to Jesus – then the more likely it is I can spend a whole lot of time hanging out on that mountaintop of glory. I want long blissful times of bright lights, and joy, and God clear and present in front of me. Heck, to be blunt, I want to be rewarded for trying to be faithful. Here I am loving you, Lord, how about giving me an easy life filled with moments when your presence is obvious?

But that booming voice from above is clear. Listen to Jesus. And in the previous chapter Jesus has described all that is to come and it is not endless, bright sunshine and roses. They are on their way to Jerusalem and the cross. This is the final Sunday before Lent begins. On Wednesday we will put ashes on our foreheads and be reminded of our mortality. Rebekah will have the children pack up our Alleluias. We are about to enter into a rather somber liturgical season. Every year on the Sunday before Lent begins we are given a text depicting the Transfiguration, this odd, brief moment of glory revealed.



Knowing all that is to come I wish this story of the Transfiguration could have tarried a little bit longer in that time of divine glow and glory. Could they not have spent a couple of days up there? Could this morning's text not have ended with Jesus still brightly shining? Perhaps I should have edited the length of the reading so we ended with Jesus, Elijah and Moses chatting away.

But in reality I think there is so much good news in the way this text plays out. I want all of our lives to be easy and filled with extended visions of God's brilliant glory in our midst. However, you and I both know that is not how we actually live. If the Gospel of Mark was nothing but an extended vision of a bright and shiny Jesus sitting on a mountaintop with the disciples, it might be a lovely daydream but it would have no connection to what our lives look like.

The telling of this story of how fleeting and ephemeral are the opportunities to experience God's glory is actually a great comfort. As we go through our days with very few glimpses of God's glory, it does not mean we are doing something wrong, or that God has forgotten about us. This is simply the way in which God is present in the world. Many people ask why this is the case. Why can't God give us a daily blast of glory to get us through the slog? And there are plenty of theological answers proffered. But, in the end I am not sure the "why" matters so much. The more important question is "how." How do we respond to this reality?

If we are lucky we do have moments in our lives when we get some sense of God's glory. Sometimes we experience God's glory in worship. We are in the midst of singing a favorite hymn and this wave of energy passes through us, and we find ourselves welling up with tears for no specific reason, and it is clear to us that God is indeed alive and powerfully present with us. Sometimes we experience God's glory in nature. A sunset, or a sweeping panoramic view takes our breath away and God's creative power is on obvious display. Sometimes we experience God's glory in some transcendent moment, when we least expect it; serving a meal to the homeless at Jan Hus; or getting a hug from a good friend; or just sitting quietly by ourselves and praying. But in so many other times that real and powerful presence



of God eludes us. And these times can be so long they make us question whether those glory moments are even real.

As we have learned from this text, even the disciples who were with Jesus only caught glimpses of God's glory. They had to figure out how to manage all those days when there was more trudging than celebrating, more doubts than certainties, more difficulties than victories. The gospel of Mark portrays the disciples as a relatively clueless bunch. They are ever confused by what Jesus is doing. But they do continue to follow Jesus. As Jesus keeps immediately striving forward from one place to the next, from one action to the next, the disciples doggedly follow. They only fall away at the very end when they cannot keep pace all the way to his cross. But even in the aftermath of the cross, the women are instructed to send the disciples back to Galilee, where Jesus, now risen, is once again ahead of them on the journey. And they follow.

Those original three disciples on the mountaintop did not know it that day, but what they were seeing was a glimpse of the resurrection to come – a hint of God's power to transform, a small taste to whet their appetite and spur them onward to continue the journey with Jesus, even back into the muck of the every day.

This series of sermons makes it clear that we can never quite keep up with God on the move in our midst. But these fleeting glimpses of glory can serve us well on the race. As we prepare to enter Lent, we are given this glimpse of glory, which is in essence a preview of the resurrection to come. There is no way for us to live round the clock in God's glory because we live in this liminal, in-between stage of being told of the resurrection, of Christ's defeat of death, and yet we are still living our mortal lives.

We have been promised that one day we will be made whole, that all that limits and ails us will be swept aside. But as long as we are chugging around on this earth, we are just not there yet. The glory of God cannot be fully revealed to us because we are part of that glory and we are not all the way there just yet. In the end it will not be solely Jesus, Moses and Elijah glowing, bathed in divine light,



but Peter, James and John as well, and even the likes of you and me. We just cannot fully see it from this end of things.

Instead of bemoaning the reality that glimpses of God's glory are so fleeting, we need to treasure them. We need to preserve them and carry them with us ever so gently. And we need to follow the example of those clueless disciples. Even if we do not understand fully what is going on. Even if it can be a dusty slog some days, heck most days. We continue to try and follow Jesus. For us that starts here, in the church, what we have been promised is the body of Christ.

Here we can gather together and share these fleeting moments of ephemeral glory with each other. We can remind each other that they do indeed exist and will continue to occur. And we can continue tell each other that though the glory we experience is fleeting and fragile; it is previewing the glory of the resurrection; of God's very overturning of death itself; of an eternal promise so strong and true we can bet our very lives on it.

So before we descend into Lent let us picture this moment of glory up on that mountaintop. Let us remember the moments of our own when God has revealed Godself in glory. Regardless of how ephemeral they may be, they are hints of God's power to transform; a small taste of the promise given; a sign of the resurrection. Our closing hymn, *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones*, is filled with *alleluias*. Our last chance to sing them before Lent. Let's sing them with gusto today for the promise and the glory that await at the completion of our journeys, Lenten and otherwise.

Thanks be to God. Amen.