

*“Behold the King in All His Glory”*

February 14, 2010

**Transfiguration Sunday**

**Luke 9:28-36**

For Peter, John, and James, it was an experience they would never forget. They had been with Jesus for some time now, traveling through the countryside, hearing him preach and teach, watching him heal the sick and perform miracles beyond their belief. Most recently, they were part of a missionary effort with the other disciples. Jesus sent them out with power and authority to cast out demons, to cure diseases, and to proclaim the kingdom of God. Their missionary work was so effective that even King Herod heard about it, wondering who this Jesus was, whether or not John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, or if Elijah had appeared, or if one of the other ancient prophets had arisen. When they returned from their missionary journey, they witnessed the miracle of Jesus feeding five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Then, when Jesus was praying alone, with the disciples near him, he asked them this question, **“Who do you say that I am?”** Peter answered correctly by saying, **“The Messiah of God,”** only to be confused again when Jesus told his disciples that **“The Son of Man must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day.”** Jesus challenged them with what it means to be his disciple, saying, **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** It had been a whirlwind of a trip with this one named Jesus. But it was only to get even more interesting.

Jesus took the three of them up on the mountain to pray with him. There are two things that we should take note of right away. Special and unusual things happen on mountains. They are places of special revelation, where God reveals something about himself. The other is that Jesus prays before important events in his life. His trip to the mountain was not to disappoint as **“the appearance of Jesus’ face was changed, and his clothes became a dazzling white.”** Then they saw two men appear with Jesus. It was Moses and Elijah, the law-giver and the great prophet. For both of them, they had special experiences on mountains. It was on Mt. Sinai that God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone. Our first lesson tells us that when Moses came down from the mountain **“the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.”** For Elijah, he fled from his enemies to Mt. Horeb and there God spoke to him **“in a still small voice”** reassuring Elijah that God had not abandoned him. Here on the mountain **“they appeared in glory”** with Jesus, **“speaking about his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”**

This term **“glory”** is an interesting one, a word that troubles me and causes me to wonder what it means and if I have ever experienced such a state. **“They appeared in glory.”** In the dictionary it says that glory means exalted honor or praise, adoration, or majestic beauty and splendor. There are other times the word is used in Luke’s gospel, such as when Jesus is born, **“and the glory of the Lord shone around them (the shepherds) and they were terrified.”** Another time was when old Simeon lifted up the Christ Child in the temple saying that Jesus is **“a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** Jesus uses the word to describe the end of time, **“then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”** After his resurrection, Jesus explained to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, **“was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”** As I look at these references and think about what the disciples experienced on

this mountain, glory is the experience of the fullness of God. It can't get any grandeur or great. Peter, John and James, were experiencing something beyond their wildest imagination.

It's no wonder then that Peter wanted to make this moment last forever. Wiping the sleep away from his eyes, Peter says he wants to make a memorial to this awesome event, commemorating the time that they had experienced the fullness of God. But, again, Peter did not really understand what was going on or what he was saying as a voice from heaven interrupts him in mid speech saying, **"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"** We heard this voice before, at the beginning of Epiphany when Jesus was baptized. It confirmed for him his acceptance and identity as God's beloved Son, empowering him by God's Spirit to carry out the mission and ministry that God had sent him to do. Now, at the end of the season of Epiphany, we hear the voice again, reconfirming the identity of Jesus as God's only Son, empowering him for the final part of his journey, his trip to Jerusalem where he will complete God's plan and purpose for the salvation of the world. Here, just before we begin the season of Lent, we see a glimpse of his glory. Then, after his death and resurrection, we will behold the King in all his glory.

Like I said earlier, this word glory troubles me and I wonder what it means and if I have ever experienced such a state. What I have learned from this story is that Jesus' glory is tied to what he said earlier about his suffering and death and his challenge of discipleship. Jesus' glory does not by pass his suffering and death, and our participation in that doesn't either. You can't get to Easter without going through Lent. As **"they appeared in glory"** with Jesus, Moses and Elijah were talking to him about his departure which was to be accomplished in Jerusalem. Jesus' glory is tied to his saving act and his giving of himself for the sake of the world. We participate in that glory when we listen to Jesus and follow his example. Have I ever witnessed the glory of God? I think I have.

The tragedy in Haiti has had a great impact on all of us, causing many to question the goodness of God and why God would allow such a thing to happen. They say that over 200,000 people have been killed in the quake. One religious leader in this country spoke out saying that the reason for the earthquake was that the people of Haiti **"made a pact with the Devil"** when in the early 1800's they called upon their gods to bring victory over the French who kept them in slavery. That is a terrible, insensitive statement and bad theology. While he sees it as punishment, others see God at work in the relief efforts going on there where people from all over the world are sending in food and water, shelter and medicine. The glory of God is seen in people living out their faith in loving service to their neighbor, just as Jesus gave of himself for the sake of others.

There was a similar reaction after hurricane Katrina in the gulf region five years ago. There were some who said it was punishment for the kinds of things that go on in New Orleans. The problem with that interpretation is that the worst of the hurricane hit in the neighboring state of Mississippi, inflicting more trouble on one of the poorest states in the union. In contrast to that, the glory of God was seen last summer when thousands of young people went to New Orleans for the ELCA Youth Gathering. In an editorial, one writer talked about the kindness of strangers. He wrote: "The end of July brought the biggest convention to town since Hurricane Katrina, but it wasn't doctors, lawyers or other professionals. In fact, it wasn't even adults. It was 37,000 teenagers and their chaperones from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who filled hotels all over town for the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering, which they called "Jesus, Justice, and Jazz." He went on to talk about the service projects that they did all over town as part of their trip. He wrote: "In all, our Lutheran visitors from all over the United States

contributed a quarter of a million volunteer hours to the people of New Orleans – and, in many cases, thanked us for the chance to have done so.” It was there that they could see the glory of God.

Faith in Jesus makes a difference in our lives, in how we live and treat one another, in how we spend our time and the activities we choose to do. In the early church, Christians had an impact on their communities as people responded by saying, **“See how they love one another.”** One of my colleagues told me of what a teacher told him one day, **“our credentials are in our countenance.”** The way in which we present ourselves, how we see the world around us, how we respond to the needs of people, people may see in us the presence of God’s glory. The last line of my favorite musical *Les Miserables* goes, **“When you love another person, you see the face of God.”**

Let us go now with Jesus to Jerusalem where his glory will be revealed in all its fullness through his death and resurrection. As we behold the King in all his glory, may we with the King share in his glory through our faith, and in our loving service to others. Amen.