

“Why This Glimpse of Glory?”

Mark 9:2-9 - After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Dear friends in Christ,

When reading through the Bible, one question that often enters a person’s mind is “Why?” Why did this event happen? Why did this person do that? Why did he say it that way? “Why?” is a good question, among many others, to consider when studying the Scriptures. Just as young children often ask their parents “Why?” so that they can learn more about the things they encounter, we too want to wrestle in our minds over why certain things were recorded for us on the pages of Scripture.

The words of Mark’s gospel before us today also beg that question, “Why?” Why did God record this awesome event for us? This event is the only time in Scripture when Jesus revealed his divine glory. Most of the time Jesus looked like any other human being you might encounter walking down the street. When Jesus took on human flesh he did not cease to be true God, rather he kept that divine glory hidden, he did not make full and constant use of his divine glory so that he could ultimately suffer and die as the Savior of the world. But from time to time Jesus would reveal some of that divine glory through a miracle that he performed. However, the Transfiguration is the only time when his appearance also revealed his divine glory. So why reveal it now and why reveal it to just three of his disciples? Why this glimpse of glory? That is the question we will keep before us and seek to answer as we dig deeper into this familiar account.

At the time of the Transfiguration Jesus was already about two-thirds of the way through his public ministry. He had already called his disciples. He had spent a lot of time preaching, teaching and healing people in the regions of Judea and Galilee. But now Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds in order to spend more time instructing his disciples. He wanted to prepare them for their future work as his heralds, as his messengers, and to prepare them for his upcoming suffering and death. This was brought out in the verses right before our sermon text, **“He (Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).**

Unfortunately, the disciples like so many of the people had their own false notions about the work Jesus came to do. When Jesus told the disciples that he would suffer and die and rise three days later, Peter objected and said, **“This will never happen.”** Obviously more instruction was needed. And so six days after Peter verbally objected to Jesus’ suffering and death, Jesus took Peter, and also James and John, and went up a high mountain by themselves.

In Luke’s account of the Transfiguration we are told Jesus took them up there to pray, and that eventually the disciples fell asleep. While Jesus was praying he was transfigured, his appearance changed. What exactly was this like? The evangelists almost seem to struggle to find words to describe it. Matthew describes Jesus’ face shining like the sun and his clothes becoming as white as the light. Luke mentions that the appearance of Jesus’ face changed and his clothes became blindingly bright like a flash of lightning. And in our text, Mark describes his clothes becoming extremely white, whiter than anyone could bleach them. What Peter, James and John were experiencing was the form of God shining through the form of the servant. Jesus’ divine glory which was normally hidden while in the flesh was partially revealed to the disciples.

But that wasn’t all, suddenly two men, Moses and Elijah appear and were talking with Jesus. Luke tells us that they spoke with Jesus about **“his departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.”** While all of this was going on, Peter, James and John suddenly woke up from their sleep to get a glimpse of this glorious event. This was indeed an awesome event for them to witness, but at the same time it was frightening. It is always terrifying for sinners, like these three disciples, to be in the presence of God.

So what was this all about? Why this glimpse of Jesus’ glory? It isn’t too difficult to answer the why. Less than 9 months after this glorious transfiguration these same disciples would see Jesus up on top of another hill but it would be a much different scene. Rather than seeing some of Jesus’ divine nature shining through, they would watch as Jesus **“humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).** In his state of humiliation, by not making full and constant use of his divine glory, Jesus would allow himself to be arrested, mocked, beaten, and

executed on a cross. But thankfully it wouldn't end there, Jesus would also triumphantly rise from the dead. Jesus had begun to teach his disciples about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection, and now his transfiguration authenticated that claim. Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the exact Savior who was prophesied in the Old Testament, who had the power to accomplish God's plan of salvation.

You would think that after witnessing an awesome event like this the disciples would get it and fully understand Jesus' mission and purpose for coming to earth. But that isn't the case. Peter in his terrified state blurts out, **"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. (He did not know what to say, they were so terrified.)"** To see glimpses of Jesus' divine glory and to see men who hadn't walked the face of the earth for hundreds and hundreds of years now alive and talking to Jesus was a preview of heaven and a faith-strengthening experience for these three disciples. You can't blame Peter for wanting to prolong the event with his suggestion to set up tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. But heaven is not found here on earth. This was just a glimpse of what was to come and helped explain the reason Jesus came to earth. He came to remove our sins and its curse so that all who believe in him can one day enter the eternal glories of heaven and enjoy that heavenly bliss not just for a few passing moments on a mountaintop but for all eternity.

Have you ever had one of these mountaintop experiences? Have you had a moment in your life that just seemed so perfect, so glorious, or so spiritually right? Maybe it was your confirmation ceremony, your wedding, or even a funeral service. For a moment you forgot about all that "stuff" going on in your life, you forgot about all the worries and the stress, and you simply focused on God's grace and his goodness in your life and the lives of your loved ones. But like Peter, James and John we need to be reminded that heaven is not to be found this side of the grave, and that our feelings will not always be in tune with our faith. And yet we don't need to despair. As we continue our journey towards that heavenly glory which our Savior has prepared for us, he will be with us every step of the way.

In our text, to redirect the disciples from this false notion of seeking heaven on earth, we see God the Father intervening. **"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.'"** These words of God the Father are similar to the words he spoke at Jesus' baptism marking the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. There the Father also voiced his love and approval of his Son. And now he also adds the command to **"listen to him."** This command is quoting a prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:15 and acknowledges that Jesus is the prophet that Moses looked forward to, **"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."** Listen to Jesus. If only the disciples would have done that they wouldn't have been so confused about Jesus' mission, they wouldn't have denied him and deserted him. As we see after this event the disciples still did not fully understand Jesus' work and mission. And neither would the crowds of people which is why Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about this glorious event until after his resurrection. Jesus didn't want the crowds of people to misunderstand this event and desire even more to make Jesus their earthly king. But fifty days after Jesus' resurrection the disciples would receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would enable them to fully grasp and understand Jesus' purpose. Then it would be appropriate for them **"to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).**

"Listen to him," that is a command we need to take to heart as well. Our faith is centered on our Savior Jesus. Our lives are all about Jesus. And yet how often don't we fail to listen to him and instead come up with our grandiose ideas of what this life is all about. Too often we listen to ourselves, or we listen to the whisperings of Satan in our ear, or the shouts of the sinful world around us. We deny and desert our Savior as we pursue the things that the world tells us are important. We pursue an earthly glory that is fleeting and useless. We don't take time every day to sit at the feet of our Savior and listen to him as he speaks to us in his Word.

For failing to listen to our Savior we must repent. God, forgive us for thinking we know what is best and failing to listen to him. Repent of that sin and then turn to the Word of God. Listen to your Savior. As we now enter the season of Lent listen with the ears of faith given by the Holy Spirit to the passion history of our Savior. Hear how Jesus came down from this mountain where he revealed his divine glory and how he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Hear how Jesus refrained from using that divine power so that he could suffer and die for you to pay for all the times you didn't listen to him and for all the times you gave into sin. Hear again Jesus' triumphant announcement from the cross, **"It is finished!"** And then hear the reports of the empty tomb and how Jesus appeared to his disciples on Easter morning alive and victorious. And finally hear our Savior's comforting promise that he has returned to heaven to prepare a place for us where we will bask in the brilliance of his divine glory for all eternity.

So why this glimpse of glory? It really was for the benefit of those three disciples, it was for the benefit of you and me, and for the benefit of all people. It leads us to say how truly good it is for us to be here with Jesus right now in his Word and to one day be with him forever in the glory of heaven.