

## Glory Mark 9:2-9

How do we make sense of this strange account of Jesus on the mountain? This moment of glory? This changing of his clothing, this moment with exalted ones? What are we to make of the fact that it doesn't last, but leads to a time of suffering and death? What are we to make of the utter despair of his followers when their fair haired angel, instead of bringing victory against the axis of evil, dies an obscene death, discredited, rendered powerless by the forces of evil? How are we to understand then the resurrection that followed, seen and heralded by his disciples but so unapparent that even some of the disciples who met on the mountain in Galilee doubted? Why didn't the risen Jesus, like an avenging angel, punish those who nailed him to the cross? At least he could have danced in the streets, or appeared before the Sanhedrin and said, "Whose in charge now?" Why didn't he go to those who mocked him and challenged him to come down from the cross? "Remember me?" Why didn't he dance in their streets, walk across their swimming pools and show them what tremendous fools they all were? What are we to make of it all?

Strangely, the shape of Christ's life from the transfiguration to the resurrection looks much like the season of Lent, for here we are, today, on the mountaintop with Jesus, watching him transfigured in Glory and talking with the celebrities of the faith, Moses and Elijah. What a wonderful, shining, awesome experience! Surely Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking about the victory march, or the final end of all history, when every wickedness is snuffed out and long suffering righteousness is finally rewarded. Not if you judge by the events that are to come. Judging by these they are not talking about a winning game, but about suffering and death and a cross which are, somehow, God's salvation for the world in his son, Jesus Christ. Today the light of glowing garments, but as Christ went down the mountain to face suffering and death, we too, go through a period of reflecting on the suffering and death of Christ. All who care to do so can come on Wednesday and put ashes on their foreheads as a reminder of their mortality. And then, after the season is over, we read again the glad good news of Easter. Christ's journey from transfiguration to resurrection is what we relive in the season of lent.

The transfiguration must have been a glorious moment. But where is it that Glory to be found? Isn't glory to be found in the victory? Isn't glory to be found on the winning team? Wasn't this what Satan was trying to persuade Jesus at the beginning of his ministry when he laid out all the kingdoms of the earth at his feet and said, "All these can be yours." All these! All the power! All the Glory! All the victory! Yours! Why suffer, why die, why hurt? Why be empty? Where is glory to be found? Satan would say, "Here, in the power of kingdoms, in conquering the world. This is glory!" But Jesus waived it on.

The Disciples wanted this kind of glory. They wanted it so bad they could taste it. So badly that they gave up everything for it. But it hadn't come. Listen to them complain. "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" If they have received glory, it sure doesn't feel like glory to them.

They have given everything they have for hope of glory. And they think they know what glory will look like, and what glory would feel like, if it ever comes. It will be the day when Christ is victorious and puts one of them on his right hand and one on his left. It will be the day their enemies bow at their feet. It will be when they rulers, instead of oppressed people. That's what glory is going to be like.

And now Jesus takes them up onto the mountain. And now Jesus is transfigured before him, and his garments become glisteningly white. Elijah and Moses come, too, and they're talking with Jesus. It is so beautiful, and yet so awesomely frightening. They are so frightened that they don't know what to say. They have been waiting so long for this very victory day. They know their Bibles. Their Bibles say that before the final day of the Lord comes, before victory day arrives, before the forces of evil are forever banished by the God of light, before this day Elijah must return. Look! Here he is before their very eyes. Elijah and Moses with Jesus in light resplendent.

They had read Jewish descriptions of the end time. The descriptions were just like what was happening there, on the mountain of transfiguration. Maybe the disciples think, at least for a moment, that the day of the Lord has come, that the end of time has come. They hope that it has come. They want it with all their hearts. What a wonderful short circuit to the kingdom this would be! No painful rejection by those in power. No humiliating scoffing from those who don't believe. No hard lives of learning and serving. No dying upside down as Peter is said to have done, or in a Roman execution as Paul is said to have done. "Look, you scoffers! Whose sorry now?!"

I think that we long for the same kind of glory that the disciples longed for. They wanted earthly power and glory. We, too, sometimes envy the wealth and power to be had in our world. We have a love/hate relationship with celebrities. What would it be like to win the lottery, or have even a tenth of the fame and money that Katherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglass have. Just recently there was a mini-documentary about Michael Jackson. Here is a person who, in one sense, has it all. Huge house, filled with everything and anything that he wants. And yet he is so unhappy with himself that he has changed his face so often that it is falling apart. Now I'm not saying that this is what Hollywood celebrities are like. There are many who have more ability to move express ideas and emotion, to draw people in, to make them feel things, than I have in my little finger. And they can and do use them to help us see the world from the viewpoint of the oppressed. They can help us see beauty and pain. I'm not saying that all celebrities are like Michael Jackson. What I am saying is that here is someone whom we might feel has it made. Wealth, power, status. Looks like glory on the outside. But inside, such terrible unhappiness.

I read once in Wilson Quarterly that an early president of U.S. Steel who had millions and millions of dollars squandered it in he personal life on an array of vices. He borrowed money from a Catholic girls school promising to repay them in his will, and when he died, he was penniless and all that was left over was his debt. He had it all. And yet he stole from a charity and missed an

opportunity for ministry. It looked like glory on the outside, but the glory had no compassion.

Sitting in the light of that transfiguring moment, Jesus' disciples have visions of Glory. They hope to sit at the right hand and left hand. Before they know it evil will be crushed and the oppressed vindicated victoriously. The tables will be turned. No darkness, just light. No suffering, just power.

And then this voice comes from the cloud. "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." The last time a voice came from the cloud it was at Jesus' baptism, and only Jesus heard it. It was addressed to Jesus. "You are my beloved son." Now the message is disclosed to these three disciples. "This is my beloved son, listen to him." God finally is revealing God's will to them. They look around to see what the message is. What do they see? Only, human, vulnerable, Jesus, walking down to the cross they so much want to deny. "Listen to him." "Listen to him!" It is as if the voice is trying to tell them to stop frantically longing for the end to come and get back to living in the present and listening to God's word. Where is glory to be found? Not in a short-circuit kingdom. Glory is to be found in the ministry of Christ in this hurting world. Glory is to be found, God's presence is to be found in the word around which believing people gather.

Frank Mason North has written a wonderful hymn. As you listen to it, you realize that he is writing about the transfiguration. Jesus is up on the mountain, talking with Moses and Elijah in blinding light and transfigured glory. Down below, a hurting world, where you hear the cries of race and clan. There thresholds are darkened with fears. There souls are famished. There people are burdened by sorrow and greed. There they long for the compassion of a healing touch. Jesus up there. A world of hurt down here. "O Master, from the mountainside, make haste to heal these hearts of pain." Peter, James and John would have stayed on the mountainside, in booths, basking in the glory. But the glory was not in staying. The glory was in the touch that healed lepers and in the words that gave hope to the hopeless, and in the dying pain that identified with the pain that so many in our world feel. They heard the voice. They looked again--Jesus alone going down from the mountainside. Where is the glory? Jesus alone goes down. The voice says, "This is my beloved son. Listen to him."

Where do we think we are going to find glory? Maybe back in the 50's when there was never enough room to house everyone that came to church and you had to build bigger buildings. Maybe in the splendor of a crystal cathedral. Think of what the singing there must sound like! Maybe glory will be found only when the Day of the Lord finally comes and all doubts are ended. How blind the disciples were to Jesus presence. They had such a hard time seeing what God was revealing to them. Even on the mountain, they did not understand. When we look to the past for glory; when we look to the future for glory, we will find, I think, that we are blind to Christ's presence with us now. We think we can see Jesus back then, or when the kingdom comes, but Jesus said the kingdom is among us. Do we see him in here where God's word is read and God's Spirit moves on open and willing hearts? Do we see Jesus in classes to teach, leaks to fix, shut-ins to visit, benefit dinners to prepare and serve? Do we see Jesus in

months where there is more month than check, in grey winter days and snow that won't give up? Do we see Jesus in our baptism, and in bread broken and praise sung from the heart? Is it possible to so focus our eyes on the future or the past that we miss the footprints of God's presence in the sand of today? Our lives often look so different from the transfigured Jesus that we wonder if anything is happening at all. And then someone comes up and tells us how much something we said meant to them. And we don't even remember saying it. Circumstances cut short our plans, and an impossible good comes into our lives. Suddenly we get the feeling that there is something there of which we had no awareness. Like Jacob we say, "The Lord was here, and I didn't know it." God's glory present, but we don't see it. Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. Open our ears, Lord, we want to listen and hear him. And when we listen, what will we hear? What is it that God is trying to tell us about ourselves, about his presence and love, and purpose for us?

Glistening robes were and are a symbol for the resurrection life. In our baptism we enter into that new life. To be confess Christ as Lord takes only a moment. To grow in faith and maturity takes a lifetime. God is truly present with us in the sacrament of communion. We believe that God is truly present, becomes real in the word spoken and Holy Spirit here.

We come now to the season of lent. We are sent into the season by God's word, "This is my beloved son, listen to him." Let us open our ears and our eyes. Perhaps we will sense God's glory, not in the past, not in the future, but now, in these coming weeks. Let us open our ears to hear his voice, not in dreams of past, or of future Glory, but in our Glorious God speaking to us now.