

"Changed From Glory Unto Glory"

February 11, 2018

Dr. Frank J. Allen, Jr., Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them,

3 and his clothes became dazzling white,
such as no one on earth could bleach them.

4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

A WHOLE NEW LIGHT

Did you ever think that you knew someone really well ...and then you learn something about that person that shocks you?

The news could be good or bad.
But, one thing is for sure.
You never look at the person the same way again.

As the saying goes,
“You see them in a whole new light.”

In today’s lesson the disciples have an experience
that causes them to look at Jesus in a whole new light.

Now, they had seen a lot already.
Demons cast out.
Thousands fed with five loaves and two small fish.

Lepers healed.
Amazing parables.

Walking on water.
Commanding the wind and the waves.

A dead girl given new life.

No wonder Peter,
speaking for the rest of the disciples
said that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Who else could do such things?

But, just when you think that you’ve got Jesus figured out, something else happens that makes you look at him in a whole new light.

GLORY

Today’s lesson marks a turning point for the inner circle of disciples.
Peter, James and John get to see more.

They get to see glory.
...Glory
...the very presence of God
...shining in the face of Jesus.

Peter's declaration is confirmed from upon high.

And with this glorious vision of Jesus,
the disciples also see Moses and Elijah.
Jesus is indeed the Messiah predicted by the prophets.

And the presence of the cloud and the voice from above let them know that
Jesus is more than a Messiah.
Jesus is God's beloved Son.

And the lesson concludes with a command from upon high.
"Listen to Him."

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

In Mark's gospel, this Transfiguration is bracketed by two predictions of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection

The reason we're jumped ahead in Mark's story from chapter 1 to chapter 9
is that next week we will be entering the season of Lent.

Once again we will walk with Jesus and his disciples
on the road to the cross and the resurrection.

That journey begins with the Transfiguration.

It's important that we read Mark's story of the Transfiguration in context.
Mark wants us to know that the glory of the mountaintop will soon be replaced
by the road to the cross.

The one surrounded by Moses and Elijah,
the one whose face shines like the sun,
the one who is heralded by God ...

...that same one will be the one who will be betrayed, killed
... and in three days rise from the dead.

And when that happens,
...once again his appearance will change.
There will be even more glory.

But, Jesus' identity will not change.
His will be the same person.

He will be Jesus of Nazareth,
the beloved Son of God
...fully human
...fully divine.

He is the Messiah.

Not even the grave will contain his glory.
The glory of God is greater than the power of sin and death.

GLORY ON THE MOVE

And, this story teaches us that the glory of God is always on the move.

That's why Peter's suggestion seems so foolish.

Peter said,
"Let's build some shrines on the mountaintop,
and stay here forever."

Doesn't work that way.
If we go with Jesus,
we might catch fleeting glimpses of glory.

But, more often than not his presence is shrouded in mystery. He comes to us disguised in human flesh.

And His presence is found in those places that are filled with suffering.

You see, the road to the cross is just not a path that Jesus took long ago.
The road to the cross is a path that we take today.

And like Peter, James and John,
we too will be overwhelmed by the message from upon high.

We too will tremble.

One of my favorite hymns is a Good Friday hymn.
It asks a fearful question.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

And the response?
Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble...

Glory still creates holy fear.

CHANGED BY GLORY

I wonder.
What was the purpose of this vision?
What did God want to accomplish by giving the disciples this glimpse of
glory?

Maybe Jesus wasn’t the only one transfigured that day. Maybe, ever so
gradually, those disciples were also transfigured as well.

I think of that line from the Battle Hymn of the Republic,
“...with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.”

The point of glory revealed is to get disciples to really listen to Jesus.

Peter, James and John would never be the same.
They not only looked at Jesus in a whole new light.
They also listened to the words of Jesus more closely.

This glimpse of glory changed them.

And they began to understand, sometimes much to their own chagrin, that
the Messiah would not allow them to build shrines on the mountaintop.

They wouldn’t be able to stay in the safe places...
far above the suffering and chaos of the world.

If they were going with Jesus,
they would be going back down the mountain.
They would be going to those places where there was suffering and pain.

According to Jesus they would be taking up a cross.

Eventually they would learn to listen.

In those places of suffering eventually they would learn to hear the voice of Jesus.

In those places they would begin to understand what the kingdom of God was really all about.

When all is said and done,
they will take up a cross and follow.

HARD OF HEARING

But, right now these disciples are having a hard time hearing anything.

They were the inner circle.

They had been with Jesus from the beginning.

But, on the mountaintop they don't recognize the Jesus they see.

In fact, they are terrified by what they see,
and they are especially terrified by what they hear.

The Bible tells us that whenever people get too close to the glory of God,
it's too much to bear.
It's even dangerous.

No one could see God and live.

When the prophet Isaiah saw the glory of God in the Temple, his first reaction was fear.

He said,

"Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips
and I live among a people of unclean lips
yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)

In the story of the Exodus,
Moses got to "see" God and receive his commandments.

And that changed him.
His face reflected the glory that he had seen.

And this reflected glory was too much for the people to bear. They had Moses wear a veil.

And so it shouldn't surprise us to learn that the disciples don't know what to say in the presence of such glory.

The Bible tells us,
"They were so afraid."

But, the interesting thing in this passage is that Peter,

despite being afraid,
despite having no clue about what to say,
goes ahead and says something anyway!

And what did Peter say?
Let's build some shrines on the mountaintop.
If all else fails build a big building!

The church has been following Peter's advice for many centuries now.

But, that was not the right response.
And so, Peter's speech on the importance of shrines was interrupted by God.

He and the others were overshadowed by the cloud ...the cloud of God's presence.

And the voice from the cloud gave a promise and a command,
The promise? "This is my beloved son."
The command? "Listen to him."

Don't talk.
Listen.

SEARCHING FOR GLORY TODAY

In this past few sermons I have challenged you to consider the fact that maybe we don't know Jesus as well as we thought we knew him.

I've admitted to you that even after many years of preaching sermons and teaching the Bible,

Jesus still has a way of ambushing me.
Jesus still has away of presenting me
with an experience that leaves me speechless.

That can happen several ways.

Some of us have our own dramatic mountaintop experiences.
We've have been turned inside out and upside down by glory.

We look back to that day every day.

But, honestly,
not many get to see that kind of glory.

Only Peter, James and John followed Jesus up the mountain.
The others stayed in the valley.

I wonder if that's still true today
...at least for most of us.
Most of us have not seen the glory of the mountaintop.
Most of us live our life in the valley.

Now don't misunderstand.

That doesn't mean the glory of God does not come close.
It just means that the glory of God comes to us disguised in mundane and often human forms.

Maybe the words of a fellow disciple touches us deeply.

Maybe the words and music of a hymn
speaks to us in an unexpected and powerful way.

Did you ever wake up in the middle of the night
singing (to yourself) Amazing Grace.
I have.

Just the other night I awoke to the tune of “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”.

I guess you could contend that those were just random neuron firing while I slept.

Heaven knows I have a lot of random neurons these days!

But, I wonder.

Is God trying to speak to me in some way?

Is God trying to tell me that his glory is near even when I’m asleep?

Our creed tells us that in life and in death we belong to God. The Bible tells us that no matter where we go God goes with us.

It's just that sometimes
... we don't know where to look.

GLORY IN A CAB

I have a suggestion.

Start trying to see the glory of God in a human face.

Jill Duffield, the editor of the Presbyterian Outlook magazine told a story about how that happened to her.

She was in San Francisco to speak at a seminary.
And on the way she struck up a conversation with her cab driver.

He was originally from Iran but had been in the United States for many years.

He retired from his trucking business.
But he soon realized that he didn't have enough money to stay retired.

So...that got him driving a cab ...
sixteen hours a day,
four days a week.

The high cost of housing in that area “kills you” he said.

“Sometimes, we really suffer.”

He lives an hour from the city where it’s somewhat cheaper, but making ends meet was a daily challenge.

Toward the end of the ride,
he asked Jill what she did for a living.

And she replied, “I’m a pastor.”
He asked her if she preached every week,
and she replied...most weeks.

They talked about other things after that.

Believe me.
Folks are often not quite sure what to say to pastors.

Once someone learns that I’m a pastor, the walls often go up.

The conversation becomes like the one you have with a policeman when you’ve been pulled over for speeding.

Very polite.
And formal.

You can almost hear them thinking,
“Now have I said anything objectionable since I met this guy?”

So they made small talk.
“It was a beautiful area in which to live,” he said,
“if you have the money.”

Finally, the ride came to an end.
Jill paid the driver, and he got her bag.

But, then the small talk ended.

As the driver handed her the suitcase he said,

“Pray for me.”

And then he said it again,
“Pray for me.”

Jill asked his name.
And she told him her name.

And, she said, suddenly she saw the man in a whole new light.

He was more than just a chatty cab driver.
He was a brother.

And she saw Jesus in a whole new light too.
She said that this Jesus was...

“Not the one I flew across the country to speak about.
Not the one present on the seminary campus where I was to stay.
Not the one contained in the boxes in which I place him.”

Instead, this encounter reminded her
that Jesus was “more majestic than the mountains” on her left and right,
and “yet as close as the person right in front” of her.

A seemingly mundane moment in her life was transfigured.

It was a moment of revelation.

And it occurred to her that she might want to listen to God, to Jesus

...not only in the clouds
...not only in Bible studies
...not only in seminaries

...but also in taxis as well!

LISTENING TO OUR LIFE

Those who have been trained as Stephen Ministers
have received training on how to become an effective listener.

But, they soon learn that's easier said than done.
Like Peter most of us...out of our anxiety
are all too anxious to speak.

Maybe if we learned to listen more,
our mundane moments might be filled with more glory.

When the disciples walked with Jesus,
glory was all around them.

Sometimes the glory was obvious.

The mountaintop.
The blind regaining sight.
The deaf hearing.
The dead being raised.

But, sometimes...
that glory was hidden
...hidden under the cloak of Jesus' humanity
...and hidden under the looming threat of the cross.

And that made it difficult for the disciples to understand and believe what Jesus was saying.

GLORY AND SACRIFICE

Earlier in Mark's gospel, Peter even rebukes Jesus for talking about the crucifixion and the resurrection.

He was a great miracle worker,
but how could anyone come back from a crucifixion?

Not possible.
At least that's what Peter thought.

No wonder he wanted to build shrines on the mountain.

He wanted no part of a crucifixion.
He wanted glory instead.

Some still preach that message.

I heard this week that a popular television evangelist said that if a Christian had enough faith,
they wouldn't be affected by the flu!

That's preaching glory without sacrifice.
And that's misunderstanding the message of Jesus.

Instead of being magically protected from the ills of the world, God in Christ calls us to risk jumping right into the middle of it all those ills.

There will be sacrifice.
There will be a cross.

But, in the sacrifice there will also be glory.

HEADED FOR TROUBLE IN THE VALLEY

I would contend that because the disciples did not understand what they had seen,
the glory of the mountain quickly faded.

As our lesson for today put it.
After it was over, the disciples looked up
and saw "only Jesus."

Maybe they even wondered if what they saw and heard was real.

On the way down the mountain,
Jesus confirmed that it was real.
But, it was an experience they were not to share with anyone.

At least not now.

Jesus told these disciples not to tell anyone what they seen ...until after the resurrection.

That wasn't hard.
They had no clue what resurrection meant.

All they knew was that they were scared to death
...and headed for trouble in the valley.

Truth be told we're in the same boat.

Scared to death.
And headed for trouble in the valley.

CHANGED FROM GLORY UNTO GLORY

We still have trouble hearing Jesus.

One commentator suggested that one reason for our hearing deficit is due to the fact that we misinterpret this section of Mark.

We preachers and teachers often talk about this encounter on the mountaintop being bracketed by two predictions of the Passion,
two predictions of the crucifixion and the events that lead up to it.

But, that's not the whole truth.

In Mark's gospel, when Jesus talks about the crucifixion, he always talks about the resurrection in the same breath.

The road to the cross is still a road that leads toward glory.

Cross and resurrection.
They still belong together.

Now Transfiguration is not an easy process.
But, by the grace of God, it still happens.

There's an allusion to this process in our next hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling".

Charles Wesley wrote of being "...changed from glory unto glory."

Some are not quite sure what he meant.
But, I think he was writing about Transfiguration.

He was writing about glory,

about a love that bit by bit, little by little,
is bringing about a new creation

.... in our lives and in the world.

Amen.