

23 February 2020  
The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“Glory Seen, Glory Done”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Exodus 24:8-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*This is a side of you I haven't seen before.* We say that sometimes. When someone who is usually kind acts mean; or when someone who is normally mean acts in a kind way. When someone who is usually generous is all of a sudden stingy; or when stingy person is unusually generous. When someone who is generally quiet and shy speaks out; or when the loud mouth has nothing to say. When the procrastinator gets something done early; or when the early bird has to pull an all nighter. You get the idea. We don't always act in character. But which is the real you? Is it the person you usually show, or the person that only occasionally slips out? Is the side of you that slips out a mistake, or what's always there but you've gotten really good at hiding it? What you see may not always be what you get.

Well today, in His Transfiguration, Jesus shows Peter, James, and John a side of Him they haven't seen before. *Or have they?*

At Christmas, we hear from the same John who saw Jesus' Transfiguration that *the Word became flesh and [tabernacled] among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).

The tabernacle was the place where God dwelled with His people. It was a holy place, and at its center was what was called the *most* holy place - where the Ark of the Covenant, the throne of God, was. But nobody got to go in there and see that glorious throne and place - only the High Priest, and he only once a year. And when he did, he didn't stay long - just long enough, really, to splash blood on it. The blood of atonement.

But though that inner most holy place was something that most people would never see, the tabernacle was still a glorious place. Because God's mercy was there. Because it was the place of forgiveness. It was the place where a holy God came to holy His people. Most people never got to see the Ark, but they did see sacrifices, and they received forgiveness. And when the mobile tabernacle later turned into the permanent Temple, it was the same way.

Which should tell us something. That the glory God wanted His people to know was not

the kind you see but the kind you hear. Not an impressive, awe-inspiring show to dazzle the eyes, but the proclamation and giving of forgiveness to soften our hearts. The reality that this glorious God is not just *being* glorious but *doing* glorious. Lowering Himself, giving of Himself, having mercy, forgiving sins, to raise us up from death to a new life.

So when Jesus is transfigured on the mountain that day, it's as if Peter, James, and John are allowed into the most holy place - the holy of holies. To see the glory that is normally hidden, but always there.

So in a sense, Jesus was showing them a side of Himself they had never seen before. But in a sense, He wasn't. Because Jesus had been showing His glory all along, just in a different way. He wasn't *being* glorious but *doing* glorious. Lowering Himself, giving of himself, having mercy, forgiving sins. Lowering Himself to the lepers, the prostitutes, the demon possessed, the outcasts, the unwanted, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the widows and orphans. And He raised them to a new life. He loved, He healed, He forgave. And it was glorious.

And then Jesus did glory most of all when He ascended the cross and splashed His blood, the blood of atonement, for the sin of the world. For every sin of every sinner that has ever lived and ever will live. No sinner excluded, no sin that wasn't on Him. To holy us. To be the sacrifice for all to see.

So when John would later write *and we have seen His glory* - was He talking about the Transfiguration or the cross? Glory *seen* or glory *done*?

Maybe a way to think about this is with the president. There's a lot of glorious looking stuff with the president. He gets to live in the White House, ride on Air Force One and in the presidential limousine, meet foreign dignitaries, host and go to State dinners, have special ceremonies in the Rose Garden, have Secret Service protection, and lots more. But if you were to ask any president, of whichever party, what was the most glorious part of being president, I don't think he would say any of those things - but rather what he did, what he accomplished while in office. Not the glory seen but the glory done. A lot of which we probably never get to see.

Peter, James, and John got to see the glory of the Son of God that day. But it really was a side of Jesus that He had been showing them all along by the glorious things His glory did. The glorious things He did for the least and the lowest - not for Himself.

Peter wanted to stay there, in this glory he could see. Of course he did! Maybe the others did too. Get away from the constant flow of people coming to Jesus and crying out to Him. Get away from the demons who were shouting at Him. Get away from the Scribes and Pharisees who were always arguing with Him. Get away from all the hassles and interruptions and troubles and busyness. And stay here. Wouldn't that be nice?

Nice, maybe. But not what Jesus was all about. Not what Jesus had come to do. It was important for those three to see Jesus like this - otherwise Jesus would not have shown them. It was important for them to know that the man who would soon be hanging on the cross, bloodied and beaten and dying, was this same Son of God. It was important so that they would know the glory of the cross - that the cross was not just a man being crucified but God laying down His life for the life of the world. All the other mercy shown and glory done culminating here, with this. The most glorious act ever and of all: the Creator dying for His creatures.

*Listen to Him!* the voice told them from the cloud. They fell on their faces, terrified. *Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.* The glory was gone. *Or was it? Or was it just beginning?*

*And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."*

How hard that must have been for Peter, James, and John! It's hard to keep secrets and not blab. And I wonder if they did or not? Or if they told the others? All the disciples messed up a lot. We shouldn't assume they actually did what Jesus said here.

But the point is clear: this is not how Jesus wants to be seen or known. Not yet. That day is coming. But first, we must see Him on the cross. First, we must know Him as the crucified one. We must have His blood sprinkled on us - the blood of atonement. He must die . . . so that we can be glorious too.

For that's why He came. Not just to be glorious but to do glorious. For you. To holy you. That you be sons of God too.

And you are. You may not look it. After you were baptized there was no glorious transfiguration for you. *Or was there?* Maybe not that you could see, but as Peter would later write, and as we heard earlier, *we have something more sure* [than what we see], *the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns* - until the Last Day. So you may not have looked any different before and after baptism, but the Word says you are. Now you are a child of God. You are holy. You are forgiven. You have an inheritance in heaven. And one day you will see all that. When you are raised from the dead. But for now, the light we live by is the Word of God. Not glory *seen* but glory *heard*.

And glory done. Lived. For like Peter said, it is good to be here. Good to be in the glory. And it would be nice to stay. Nice to get away from the all the problems of life, all the annoying people, all the pestering and interruptions, all the busyness and responsibilities

and burdens we have. But that's not why Jesus shared His holiness and glory with you. Not for limos and glamour and riches and pomp - though we do have angels protecting us. Not glory *seen* but glory *done*. Lived. Where God put you. To be glorious for others. To use your glorious standing as child of God to help and serve others. Which may look and feel about as glorious as the cross! But don't let the appearance fool you. ***Listen to Him!*** And you'll see. And you'll know.

But you do get a seat at the banquet. Not a State dinner at the White House or like on the top of Mount Sinai, when Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Joshua, and 70 of the elders of Israel got to ***behold God and eat and drink*** with Him. But a seat at this rather inglorious looking table where the food isn't that much, doesn't taste that good, and you actually don't even get to sit or kneel but have to stand! But this is glory done, glory heard, not seen. ***Listen to Him!*** And you'll hear. And you'll know. And you'll see. The Body of Christ, the Lamb of God. The Blood of Christ, the blood of the atonement. The glory of Jesus giving Himself to you, the forgiveness of sin to you, His life and salvation to you. Here. That you lead transfigured lives. Truly glorious lives.

So on Wednesday we enter the season of Lent. The season of Jesus' glory and its culmination on the cross. Like Peter, James, and John, it is important for us to stop here first, on the Mount of Transfiguration, before the cross, that we see it rightly. That we see the glory of God there for us. The glory of His love. The glory of His death. That when you ***rise and go*** from this place, that come what may in your life, you know that glory, even in rather inglorious times and places. And in them, know that when Jesus is there, they are glorious. And so now, like Peter, James, and John, we ***rise*** and go ***and have no fear***. No fear to love. No fear to serve. No fear to forgive. No fear of life. No fear of death. For the Word of God goes with us. Jesus goes with us. That we live glorious lives. Now and forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.