

Transfiguration Sunday
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Scriptures: Exodus 24:12-18, Psalm 2, 2Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9

Matthew's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus is paired up with the Old Testament account of Moses on Mount Sinai. From a scholarly, analytical perspective it is pretty easy to see that Matthew is trying to draw parallels between the two. Moses was up on the mountain, in the midst of the cloud of God's glory. And Jesus is up on the mountain, faces shining, clothes dazzling. The difference is that in the first instance, God gave Moses the Law written on stone tablets. In the second, God gave the Law written in the life and teaching of Jesus. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Jesus himself is the new commandment. His teachings, his very life, are the guide for us, for our living. I get that. That's all pretty academic, which is okay so far as it goes.

But what struck me this time, as I was grappling with the event of Jesus' transfiguration was this idea of glory, God's glory. Jesus was transfigured – appearing before his disciples in dazzling white clothes, face shining (or put another way by a different translation, "sunlight poured from his face, his clothes were filled with light). There were these few brief moments of utter radiance. In his second letter, Peter recalls that moment as having been "eyewitnesses of his majesty." In that brief moment, Jesus received, "honor and glory from God." Even though you get the impression they were frightened out of their minds, it must have been an amazing vision. Glorious!

But there is this one little verse, in Peter's letter, that intrigued me the most today. When speaking of the glory of God revealed in the event of Jesus' transfiguration, Peter goes on to say, "You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." You see, only three people: Peter, James and John, were up on that mountain to see Jesus in his brilliant transfigured radiance. Only those three saw his glory revealed in so obvious a way. And that for only a few brief moments. And then it was only Jesus again, the Jesus who walked the hot and dusty roads with them, the Jesus who tended the poor and lame.

This moment was only three or four minutes out of a three-year ministry. It cannot possibly be the whole story, it is but a small part. Yet, we are invited to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place. The glory, the glory of God revealed in Jesus, was not just for those few brief moments. I believe the glory of God was revealed in Jesus the whole of his life; it's just that most of the time it was veiled. The veil was lifted for just that one moment.

Even though the dazzling brightness of God's glory in Jesus was veiled most of the time, that doesn't mean it wasn't there.

In general, I think we make a grave error when we think that those dazzling moments in life are when we are best seeing God's glory. When life is good, when things are going well, it's easy to think that that is when God's glory is visible, God's blessings are being poured out. But maybe God's glory is more subtle than that, more hidden.

In the days of Moses, God's glory was a fearful thing. If you were to look on the face of God – you would die. After coming down from the mountain, Moses had to veil his face for it continued to radiate the glory of God and it was unbearable to behold. But in Jesus, God was doing a new thing. The fearful radiance of God's glory was displayed for only the briefest of moments. And then, far from being unapproachable, in the midst of the disciples fear, Jesus came and touched them and said, "Get up and do not be afraid."

The psalmist is fond of saying that the whole earth is full of God's glory. The people whose lives were touched by Jesus would likely have said that they saw the glory of God when their limbs were made whole, when their eyes were opened, or when their ears were unstopped. Tax collectors and prostitutes saw the glory of God when they were treated with respect and invited to the table. The centurion saw God's glory when Jesus breathed his last. God's glory is revealed in many ways, dazzling light being only one of many.

And it continues in our day. God's glory is revealed, often in the un-likeliest of moments. God's best stuff isn't the yippee-skippy, isn't-life-wonderful stuff. God's best stuff is revealed amidst the pain of the world. God's glory is in the hand and heart that reach out to console, the work crew that arrives to resurrect a flood-damaged home, the halting, but heart-felt words of a friend's prayer, the quilt wrapped warmly around a refugee in a foreign land, the peace that comes from turning life's fears and uncertainties over to God's care.

These are the moments of God's truest glory. These are the lamps shining in the dark places of our lives. These are the radiant moments that guide us, comfort us, give us hope until day dawns, until the morning star rises again in our hearts. No doubt many of you know all that to be true. I daresay, many, if not all, of us have experienced something of that glory of God shining out in the midst of our dark times.

Which means that God has done a most amazing thing. Now God's glory is not simply revealed to us. God's glory is revealed through us, to each other. It means that God sees fit to allow the light of Christ to shine through fallible, feeble folks like you and me. Incredible! But that is the foolishness of God, to work through the likes of such as us. That's what happens when we forget ourselves and open our eyes – and hearts – to those around us.

At the Theological Conference I attended this week, there was some discussion of the use of images as a powerful way to communicate, especially useful with folks who are visual learners. One example that was used was a video clip. In the clip, we saw a fellow who was all consumed with how things were going for him. The traffic was a nuisance to him. The loss of a parking spot was an inconvenience to him. The long line for coffee was a bother for him. Until a stranger walks up and offers him a special pair of eye glasses.

These eye glasses allow him to see the little labels that everyone is wearing; each label describes the struggle, the hurt, the trials each individual is dealing with: just lost their job, mourning the death of a dear friend, ran away from home, dealing with addiction, and on and on. Obviously, it changes how the guy sees the world, even when he's not wearing the glasses.

The simple fact is we all have those tags. We all have cares and burdens, wounds and sorrows. And, at least to my knowledge, none of us have those special glasses. A good start would be to assume that all of us have labels that read, "Handle with care. Waiting for day to dawn."

The truest glory of God is that Jesus comes, perhaps through friend, family, or even stranger. Jesus comes and touches us, heals us, makes us whole. And then Jesus says to each of us as well, "Get up, and do not be afraid." Therein is God's glory: the love that forgives and enfolds, the love that is constant, steadfast, reliable. God is with us, and God's glory is being revealed to us, no matter what. And although it may or may not seem like it in your particular circumstance at this particular moment, God is with you, and the time will come when the morning star rises in your heart too. Amen