

Sermon: Transfiguration Sunday 2015

Introduction

“Glory Hallelujah!” That is the phrase which comes to mind when I think about this Sunday in our liturgical year. The actual *glory* of God is our focus today.

Glory is attributed to God in our worship. We speak of giving glory to God. Just look at the *Gloria* we say in our worship—in the liturgy—on days and in seasons of wonder and praise.

“Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to his people on earth,” is how the *Gloria*—a song of praise—begins. Note that we give glory to God. It is our response to God’s ineffable nature. Giving glory is giving praise and thanksgiving for the very existence of the Supreme Lord of all. Just saying or singing *Gloria!* brings joy to the worshiper. You simply can’t say it or sing it and be down in the mouth or sad.

There are other uses of the term “glory,” such as in the phrase, “She is really in her glory,” when one is operating on all cylinders and loving life. Or, we speak of the “the Glory that was Rome’s.” And so forth.

Then there’s the phrase popularized by Major General Frederick Blesse, U.S. Air Force: “No Guts, No Glory.” It was the title of the fighter tactics manual he wrote, but it found itself into mainstream popular culture, especially popular on posters and tee-shirts. For years I had a Garfield poster in my closet with the dictum “No Gut, No Glory” depicted as he attempted a steep downhill snowy slope. (I have no idea how that posted got there, but I never took it down.)

Jesus

The Gospel reading today about the remarkable transfiguration of Jesus is done for one purpose—to reveal the divinity of Christ. This story is the last narrative in the Season after the Epiphany. (Recall that we celebrated the Epiphany January 6th.)

Jesus' status as Messiah is affirmed by the divine testimony that he is God's beloved Son. The glistening white garments—gleaming beyond what any earthly possibility would allow—symbolize that Jesus, though human, was divine. This scene portrays the Son of God made manifest—made known—to the disciples present: Peter, James and John.

Mark presents a tightly woven fabric of Christological emphases, i.e., word pictures which focus on the study of who is the “Christ”—the “Messiah.” Mark does this to make the point that Jesus is, indeed divine, and is, indeed the Beloved Son and is, indeed, the Messiah, the Savior, the Christ. (Christ is the Greek word. Messiah is the Hebrew word which both mean “savior.”)

Mark is really teaching his listeners about who Jesus is. He does not want to leave any ambiguity. Keeping in mind that he was the first of the Gospel writers, Mark's rendition of what happened on the mountain and why it happened was crucial for future New Testaments writers.

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Why is the Transfiguration scene so important? Because it was the ultimate epiphany about the nature of Jesus, and his relationship with God.

This brilliant display of otherworldliness and beauty—of glory—is the ultimate revelation that something good did come out of Galilee. Jesus of Nazareth was Lord.

That is the Good News.

The Disciples

A word about those men who were privileged to be on the mountain with Jesus...

Peter, James and John were clearly in the inner circle with their Rabbi Jesus. They were the same disciples who witnessed the healing of the daughter of Jarius. They also will witness the agony in Gethsemane. And yet, though the healing and the transfiguration suggest a special manifestation of Jesus' divine power and glory, this group of disciples does not demonstrate exceptional insight or fidelity.

They were just men. Peter had already been castigated for rejecting the necessity of suffering. James and John would soon show themselves preoccupied with greatness more than service. And all three will fail to watch with Jesus during the agony in the garden. These failures become all the more striking because the divine voice instructed them to listen to the Son. Jesus may have been the promised Mosaic prophet, but they were having a very hard time listening with comprehension or seeing with clear vision.

Poor Peter just wanted to put up little tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He wanted to domesticate that which was supernatural and glorious!

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I bring this up today to give us heart. These chosen vessels for ministry—James, John and Peter—needed lots of time and lots of possibilities to get themselves in order to take the gift of the Kingdom of God to their hearts and minds. They really were just men.

You are just men. You are just women. I am just a woman. We are all part of a movement which listens to God through Christ and tries to

take the gifts and grace of the Kingdom of God into our hearts and out to the world.

We are imperfect and often bumble in doing so, but so were Jesus' best friends and followers who lived their lives with him, and later, for him. Perhaps we can take heart when we remember this and give ourselves a little slack when it comes to our own imperfections in how we "do church" or live into what God is calling us to be and do.

I'm not trying to give cover to sloppiness or impropriety or unfaithfulness. Not at all. I am suggesting, however, that as followers of Jesus we need to be mindful that we are men and women who desperately need God to be in charge of lives and of our church.

When we do that, when we keep in mind that God is present and really in charge, we can proceed in our service and witness to what God has done in Christ with a lighter heart and a compassionate spirit.

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As we turn the corner into Lent this week, I suggest that we think about Peter and James and John and all the early disciples. Mark's Gospel is straightforward and instructive about these disciples' foibles to help us realize that despite our own foibles, our own sins, our own commissions and omissions, we are still called by God to be God's own and carry out the great commission to Love God and Love our Neighbor as our selves.

That is the glorious Truth of the Gospel. Revel in the glory of it all!

Amen

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