

In Glory
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2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

¹ Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Luke 9:28-36

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

The word "glory" peppers our readings today and occurs throughout our worship every Sunday. As part of our gathering in worship, we sing the Gloria Patri – Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen. As part of our responding to the proclaimed Word, we sing the doxology – Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below, praise Him above ye heavenly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. You may not hear the word "glory" in the doxology but it is there, tucked away in Greek as *doxa*, the first part of "doxology." In this case, the *ology* comes from *logos*, or word, so the words we sing are "words of glory." And don't forget glory in The Lord's Prayer – for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. This morning, we sang *To God Be the Glory*.

Why does this word have such a significant role in our worship? We use language like “giving glory to God.” God already has the glory so we’re not actually conferring it upon God; instead we are recognizing God’s greatness and, as a response, we are praising God. We are giving due recognition of God’s glory, which is what Paul and Peter were doing in their own ways.

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he is undoubtedly making reference to his own experience of conversion, speaking of the “before and after” of his blindness that occurred when, on his way to persecute believers of Christ, he encountered Christ himself in a blinding light. He was led to Damascus where, rather than take action upon the early Christians, they took action upon him through teaching and his eyes were opened again.¹ So we read what seems like a criticism of Judaism, as Paul writes, “Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”

Years and years ago, Hardee’s ran an ad campaign against Kentucky Fried Chicken. If I remember correctly, the slogan was “Kick the bucket” and, in the ads, they focused on bad-mouthing KFC over talking about benefits of their food. That always bothered me. In the same way, Paul’s approach bothers me. What he is trying to get across are the good reasons why he follows Christ and why others should, too. Eventually he gets there but not without seeming like he is bad-mouthing the faith in which he was raised.

Of those good reasons, he lifts up in particular the transformation that happens to each of us when we witness the glory of the Lord. He writes, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” It is his own way of describing how we aim to be more and more like Christ throughout our lives and how the Spirit acts upon us as we do.

Peter takes a different approach, not yet realizing that being a follower of Christ will mean to grow to be more like Christ. In fact the passage which immediately follows this morning’s reading speaks of how, after the transfiguration, a man approached Jesus and told him that he had asked Jesus’ disciples to cure his son but they could not so Jesus goes and does it. Peter, and the rest, had not yet gotten there with their understanding; they had not yet understood that Christ was coming to them to equip them to go out into ministry in the ways in which he showed them, by example.

Instead, the disciples are just beginning to recognize the greatness of the Lord, to see his glory. The reading opens with “Now about eight days after these sayings.” Eight days before the events of our reading, in response to Jesus’ question, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter had replied, “The Messiah of God.” In today’s reading, he, along with John and James, witness Jesus’ transfiguration, his

¹ Acts 9

change from ordinary to shining white and back to ordinary, with a visit from Moses and Elijah in the middle. They perceive that something tremendous has happened and Peter is often maligned for his response, encouraged by Luke's presentation of his response.

Peter says they should build three dwellings right there on the mountain where this occurred and Luke adds "not knowing what he said." To build a dwelling where God has been revealed, however, was part of his tradition – think of Jacob and his dream of angels going up and down a ladder – he used a rock to mark the place where, as he puts it, "surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."² Peter's eyes, too, had been opened like Jacob's. Peter, in his own way, was exclaiming, "surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it." Once he recognized God's glory, he gave God praise in a way that made sense to him.

We try to do the same in our worship. We may not have our eyes opened anew to the wonder of Jesus each Sunday but we rely on our past experiences and the experiences of those around us to remember how the veil was lifted from our eyes, how we realized and recognized the glory of God. Out of that remembering, we do what comes naturally for us, which is to sing God's praises, both literally and figuratively. In our remembering, we rely, too, on the Word spoken to us through Scripture. Here, today, amidst the experiences of Paul and Peter, God breaks in to make clear God's glory, as God seems to do with especially significant events.

Jesus is praying and, from a cloud, God speaks, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" The events of the transfiguration are especially significant because they signal the beginning of the end. We know this because it is the very topic Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are discussing – we read that they "were speaking of his departure." This significant event has a parallel in the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which is marked by his baptism. Jesus is praying and a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Pay attention! Something big is about to happen!

So today, as we get ready to enter Lent, we are reminded: Pay attention! Something big is about to happen! God's blinding, dazzling glory will soon be revealed. Today the church is clothed in white, one last glimpse of God's glory before we enter the purple shadows of Christ's suffering, suffering which is so great in order that we might understand that God can overcome anything, even death. And then God's glory will be clearer than ever and we will find ourselves in white again. Until that day, pay attention!

Let us pray: O God, open our eyes to your glory as it surrounds us in our experiences, in the experiences

² Genesis 28:16

of our brothers and sisters, and in your Word. Amen.