

GLORY UPON GLORY

Text: Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a

LHUMC 2/10/13

(Transfiguration)

- I. Introduction—Today we are talking about “glory”
 - A. How would you define “glory”? Or what images come to your mind?

It is one of those words that we may use a lot, but finding a common definition may not be so simple.
 - B. What I’m starting to understand is that “glory” is a loaded term in regard to our faith journeys.
 1. I may have already shared with you that one of my grandma’s favorite exclamations was “Oh glory!”
 - a) And I remember when she said that, it had a multitude of meanings.
 - b) It could mean anything from she had forgotten to take the blueberry muffins out the oven, or that my aunt and uncle and cousins had finally arrived out from Chicago to join us at the farm on Christmas morning (an hour late, as usual) or that her beloved Chicago Cubs had blown another ninth-inning lead.
 2. And as I read all of these stories about Jesus, I realize that in his ministry to the disciples and to those around him, the whole notion of “glory” had a multitude of meanings there as well.
- II. And today we get a classic example—two stories, and two examples of God’s glory being lived out by Jesus.
 - A. The first story is the one that we are more likely to remember. It is the story that gives this Sunday right before Lent its name—Transfiguration Sunday. It is the story that has been read in the church on this Sunday right before Lent for centuries.
 1. And if for you, “glory” is a word that conjures up visions of grandeur, visions of bright colors and beautiful sunsets and purple mountain majesties, then this is your story. This is the story that sums up that kind of glory in a nutshell.
 2. When Peter, James, and John followed Jesus up the mountain that day, we don’t know what they were expecting. Maybe some quality time together, maybe an opportunity to try to talk Jesus out of all this stuff he had been talking about—things like suffering and dying, and bearing crosses and all that. Things that seemed to be decidedly “un-glorious”.

3. But whatever they were expecting, we know what they got—a dazzling experience of glory—Jesus there shining brightly on the mountain with cameo appearances by Moses and Elijah to boot. Just think of all the special effects that God needed needed to pull all of that off!
4. This was for them what you could call a “mountaintop moment” in a literal and figurative sense.
5. And who doesn’t like a mountaintop moment? My guess is when most of us ponder what “glory” means to us, it is that kind of picture that first comes to mind.
6. And in this story, Peter, who so often speaks for us, who so often is us, does it again.
7. His reaction to this mountaintop moment, this dazzling display of God’s glory, is so typical. Namely, he wants to stay there. Not only that, he wants to build shelters or memorials to remember this glorious event.
8. If this was a worship service that they had just experienced, the most glorious service of their whole lives, Peter is basically saying, “Can’t we just stay here past 10:30, just this once?” And having seen what he saw and experienced what he did, who wouldn’t want to hang out there on the mountain for a while?
9. It’s kind of like being at a basketball game, and your team makes a game-winning shot. Or going on the coolest roller coaster you’ve ever gone on. You just want to stay there and savor the experience. That’s what Peter wanted to do. When you experience glory, it’s natural to want to hang around for a while to soak it all in.
10. As natural as this response is, we get some clues that maybe this wasn’t the response that God was looking for.
 - a) First, a cloud comes over them, replacing the dazzling glory with fear.
 - b) And then if that isn’t clue enough, next comes the voice of God.
 - 1) And what God doesn’t say is as instructive as what God does say.
 - 2) Not, “Great idea, Peter—building a memorial to my glory! One that others can come and see and relive the glory that you’ve experienced here today!”
 - 3) No instead he says, “This is my Son—listen to him.”

4) And keep in mind what Jesus right before this has been saying—these things that Peter and the rest of the disciples definitely didn't want to listen to.

5) That he is going to have to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die.

11. When this story of dazzling glory takes this abrupt turn away from the Jesus and Moses and Elijah and the dazzling light, we get the idea that perhaps when it comes to Jesus, not all glory is found on the mountaintop. That not all glory is of the dazzlingly bright variety. And more than that, that on the mountaintop is not the only place to experience the glory of God through him. And more than that, if we are to be in the presence of all the ways and places in which true glory is found, we can't stay on the mountaintop. That sometimes "listening to him", even when he is calling us to go back down with him to difficult places is the first step to experiencing his full glory.

B. And all of this is confirmed as they hike back down the mountain into the next story.

1. As they reach the foot of the mountain, basically what happens is that they arrive back into the real world. Sort of like what I had this week when you get that Monday morning when you get back from a great vacation and you have to go back to work.

2. "The next day (Monday morning)", the story goes, "a large crowd meets Jesus. And a man steps out of the crowd and says, "I have a son who is suffering terribly. I asked your disciples for help, but they weren't ready for such a daunting task. Can you help him?"

3. And Jesus does what Jesus does—drawing the evil spirit out of the boy.

4. And then that last verse—the critical one—"Awe gripped the people as they saw the majestic display of God's power."

5. You get the idea that they too had experienced the glory of God through Jesus?

6. Not in the dazzling, brightly shining face of Jesus, but in his healing touch.

7. Not amidst the beautiful scenery of the mountaintop, but in the messiness and the reality of everyday life.

8. Not surrounded by Moses and Elijah, but surrounded by people who were suffering.

9. And so you also get the idea that there is more than one way to experience the glory of God through Jesus? That in these back-to-

back stories we have yet another example that when we journey with Jesus, every day is an experience of glory upon glory upon glory.

10. You get the idea that how and where and when we experience God's glory can be as diverse as God's love itself?

11. And that for us as his disciples, if we are to not just share in his glory but share his glory with the world, there are times when we need to come down from this mountain, and follow him where he always winds up, back in the real world, surrounded by those who need him the most, those who need us the most.

C. So in the end, how Jesus would define glory is not easy to pin down either. For him, every day was and still is an exercise in "glory upon glory".

1. And if we can understand that, then we can understand that glory can be found not just on the mountaintop, not just at the top of the dune overlook at Hoffmaster, but down in the everyday places of life amidst the everyday people of life.

2. And the way it often works is that the glory we experience up there, at the high times when Jesus' light is shining in some dazzling way in our lives, that it can illumine our way down the mountain and then empower us to share the glory with those who need it down below.

III. Conclusion—A couple of final random thoughts and observations.

A. First is what a Pentecostal friend once told me that seems to apply to today. (And say what you will about Pentecostals, but what is true is that they know all about celebrating the glory when it comes to being in church if you know what I mean). He said, "It ain't how high folks jump in church that make 'em Christians. It's what they do when they hit the ground."

1. Another way to put that might be that when it comes to being a disciple, and when it comes to experiencing and then sharing God's glory, sometimes what goes up must come down.

B. Second is a painting that I always remember.

1. There are literally hundreds of paintings of Jesus' Transfiguration that have been done over the centuries. Just Google "Transfiguration Paintings" and you'll see.

2. And you can see why—it's such an incredible scene that if I were a painter, I'd probably paint it myself.

3. Of all the paintings, that I've ever seen of the story, one stands out.

4. And it's this one by the Italian painter of the early 1500's known as Raphael
 5. It's the only one I've ever seen that has both stories. (Show painting)
 6. Raphael is the only painter I've seen who apparently understood that you can't have one story without the other—you can't have one picture of glory without the other.
- C. And then finally is the reason why we read this story every year on this Sunday right before Lent.
1. It is reminder that in a few weeks we will be walking with Jesus up another mountain.
 2. That mountain is called Golgotha, the place where he will go to the cross.
 3. And on that mountain, we will experience him in all of his glory.
 4. And so in the meantime, be looking for the glory. But don't just look up on the mountain, for what we understand today is that the glory of God is also found down below, wherever folks are in need or hurting.
 5. And that is where, if we are listening to Jesus, we know that we are called to go, to share the glory with those who need it the most.
 6. So to return to the original question, maybe that wasn't the right question. When it comes to God's glory in and through Jesus, maybe it's not so much "what" that glory is for us, but more "where" is God's glory?
 7. As we now prepare for communion, to experience God's glory in the breaking and sharing of the bread and cup, watch this video that asks that "where" question, and gives some possible answers.

