

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Do you ever read a portion of Scripture and wish you could have been there? I wish I could have crossed the Red Sea with Moses and the children of Israel. Imagine the wall of water standing up on both sides, walking through and looking at the fish swimming by as if you were in an aquarium. You wonder what’s making the water stand up like that and then know that it could only be the hand of God. And when you are safe on dry ground, you turn around and watch the water roll back in place over Pharaoh’s army. Wouldn’t that be a sight to see?

The transfiguration has the same effect for me. What would it have been like to be one of the disciples on the mountain and witness the glory of God in the face of Jesus? Someday you and I will get to see that sight, when we stand before Jesus in all his glory on the last day. In fact, it will be even more wonderful because on the mountain, Jesus had to hold back the full display of his glory, or his disciples could not have stood before it.

Wouldn’t you love to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus? According to the epistle lesson this morning, we can. Paul wrote that through the gospel, God **“made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** So listen carefully morning, because Jesus will show us his glory today.

We see God’s glory in the face of Jesus!

1. On the mountain of transfiguration

Our text says that this happened six days after what happened in Mark 8. In Mark 8 Jesus asked the disciples who he was, and Peter confessed that he was the Christ, the son of the living God. Then Jesus talked to them about his suffering and death in Jerusalem. Peter was offended by that kind of talk and rebuked Jesus for talking about dying. Peter was thinking about some kind of earthly glory in which Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom. Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan, because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Six days later, Jesus showed them his glory. He took Peter, James and John up the mountain. Why not the rest of the disciples? Jesus wasn't ready to show himself to the world. He wanted these three so that they could bear witness to what they saw, but not until after his resurrection from the dead. John said **"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14). Peter wrote of this in his second letter. ¹⁶ **For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.** ¹⁷ **He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** ¹⁸ **We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain"** (2 Peter 1:15-18). These are reliable witnesses of what they saw. They are not giving us second-hand stories, but first hand, eye-witness accounts.

They SAW Jesus' glory and didn't just BELIEVE that he was the Son of God. They saw God in the face of Jesus. His face shone like the sun. His clothes were dazzling white, whiter than any bleach could make them. They saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus, these two great prophets from the Old Testament. The other gospels tell us that they talked to Jesus about his trip to Jerusalem and his suffering and death. Believers from Adam on waited for God to come down and save them. This was the moment they waited for. God came down in the person of Jesus to save us.

Why Moses and Elijah? What did they have in common? They were both prophets. But what else did they have in common? God had invited them both up the mountain so that they could see God's glory. God hid Moses in a crack on the mountain and covered him with his hand as he passed by. Just catching a glimpse of God's glory caused his face to shine like the sun. God invited Elijah up on the mountain, the very same mountain that Moses went up, and he passed by. He was not in the wind or the fire or the earthquake. Instead, God hid himself in the small, gentle voice. Sinful people, even people like Moses and Elijah, could not bear to see God in all his glory and live.

If God would appear to you today in all his glory, you would surely run away in fear or fall dead because of it. In your sinful state, you would not be able to stand before your perfect God in all his glory. God's glory would destroy you. So that you could see his glory and not die, it was necessary to hide himself in the person of Jesus. One of our Christmas hymns says, "Veiled in flesh the godhead see." On the mountain Moses and Elijah once again see God's glory. But the disciples saw it, too. They saw it in the face of Jesus. Jesus left enough of his glory peak through so that they could see it and know that he was God.

Then they heard the voice come from heaven. **"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"** Wasn't it enough to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus? God wanted these three men to be sure beyond a shadow of a doubt, as he wants us to be sure beyond a shadow of a doubt. This is the very Son of God. This is the one who was with God before God ever created the world. This is the eternal Son of God who was loved by the Father from all eternity. This is the same God who appeared to Moses on the mountain and who whispered in Elijah's ear on the same mountain. Do you believe this about Jesus? Are you sure beyond a shadow of a doubt? They say that seeing is believing. We cannot travel back in time and join the disciples on the mountain, but we can see what they saw and hear what they heard through their word and testimony.

And what did God the Father tell those disciples on that mountain? **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** This morning God is whispering in YOUR ear, “Listen to Jesus!” Are you listening to Jesus, the Son of God, who came to show us God’s glory and to show us the Father? Or are you listening to the voices of the world around you? It seems all the rage today to treat the Bible as if it were irrelevant so that we don’t have to listen to what it says. “It’s an old book. It was written for people of another day and age. We are soooo much more enlightened today. Nobody believes in miracles any more. Who can prove that God created the world? Who can prove Jesus rose from the dead?” Are you listening to Jesus or are you listening to the world? It’s the same temptation that Satan used with Eve in the Garden. “Did God really say?” We can justify our sinful actions if we can discredit the Bible in our minds. Are we listening to Jesus?

Or are we listening to our hearts instead? Jeremiah 17:9 says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”** Our heart tells us that if something bad has happened in my life, God must not love me. Or it says God must not be fair and just. I remember talking to an agnostic once who told me that for a while, he had been a believer. Then he heard about a Christian family that was traveling through Kansas. A truck crossed the median and crushed their van. The father and five children were killed. Only the mother escaped with her life. “How could a just God let that happen?” he said. When he read that story, he stopped believing. He listened to his heart instead of Jesus. Do you ever listen to your heart? Do you hear yourself whining and crying foul because life hasn’t lived up to your expectations? Do you blame God for the bad things that happen in your life? **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**

Listen to Jesus! Can you hear his voice clearly? It is the soft and gentle voice that came to Elijah. During the next six weeks of Lent we will be listening to the voice of Jesus. You will hear the voice of Jesus on his journey to the cross. You will hear him speak words of forgiveness from the cross to his enemies. You will hear Jesus promise heaven to a man who deserved to be crucified. You will hear him pray for his disciples and warn them ahead of time that they would be tempted. Is this the voice of a God who is not just or fair? Is this the voice of a God who is irrelevant? Listen to Jesus, because in the words of the gospel you will see God in a different light. You will not see the face of God through a guilty conscience. You will see the glory of God and the grace of God in the face of Jesus.

And to see God’s glory in all its beauty, you have to climb another mountain. Really, it is just a hill, a small hill called Golgotha.

2. On the mountain where Jesus was crucified

Our text says, **“Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”** The vision of Jesus’ in his glory lasted for just a few moments. When the disciples blinked, the vision of Christ and his glory were gone. Moses and Elijah went back to heaven. They walked back down the mountain, where it was business as usual. Only, it wasn’t business as usual, because we know where Jesus was going. He told them not to speak of the transfiguration until after his resurrection. You can’t have a resurrection without a crucifixion, so we

know where Jesus was going. He was headed to the cross to finish the work that God gave him to do.

Do you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus on the cross? When I watched the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” and I saw the face of Jesus, I had to turn away. I could not look. I knew that Isaiah meant when he said, **“Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness”** (Isaiah 52:14). Where is the glory in an execution? Where is the glory in such a death?

The answer to that question is not in what happened to Jesus, but in why Jesus would go through such a horrible death like this. Why would any person give their lives in exchange for someone else’s life? You would do that, wouldn’t you, for a child that you love. You would do that for a brother or sister, maybe. I remember a tragic farm accident story from some years back. On a family farm, the father had gone down into the manure pit to fix something and was overcome by the gas. His son climbed down to save him, but was overcome as well. The second brother did the same, and all three of them died.

We can understand a love like that. But would you do this for a total stranger? That’s been known to happen. Firefighters in the line of duty climbed the World Trade Center towers to rescue people that they had never met. But would you give your life for your enemies? That’s what Jesus did. We were his enemies and he died for us! **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:6-8). If we see glory in what firefighters did at the World Trade Center, how much more glory do we see in Jesus on the cross?

And remember, this wasn’t just a human being that died on that cross. This was God in Christ who died on that cross. This was the one whose glory shone through on the mountain of transfiguration. This is the one whom the voice was speaking about, “This is my Son, whom I love.” There is no other god in all the world that can begin to compare with this God who died for you! All the other gods in the world demand that you make sacrifices, even blowing yourself up in an act of revenge. But this God, our God, suffered and died for us. It takes your breath away! Do you see the glory of God in the cross of Jesus?

Brothers and sisters, like the disciples, let’s follow Jesus down the mountain to the cross. When the vision on the mountain was over, there was only a teacher in carpenter’s clothes with sandals on his feet and the word of God’s approval. There was only Jesus, with the crown of thorns on his head and a cross to carry to his own execution. There was only Jesus and a terrible death and a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world. There was only Jesus who left behind an empty grave that was never marked because it was hardly used. If you see God’s glory in the face of Jesus now and put your trust in him, then one day you will see his glory face to face. Amen.