

Title: Changed by Glory

Subtitle: The Transformative Power of a Heavenly Vision

Today's Gospel gives us a foretaste of glory. It comes six days after Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."¹ Evidently, on the Mount of Transfiguration, three of the Lord's closest disciples had a foretaste of what Jesus would be like when he comes in the glory of his kingdom at the end of this age. Luke's Gospel tells us that the "appearance of his countenance was changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." Matthew's Gospel says, "He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun." The word for "transfigured" is *metamorphoó* (met-am-or-fo'-o). It is the same root word used to describe the change in an ugly caterpillar when it is transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

In the retelling of this event, the Apostle Peter in his second epistle wrote, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."² which Strong's Concordance defines as the visible splendor of the greatness of his sovereign power and divine glory.³ Whenever we behold something beautiful, we cannot help but be changed by it.

Such was the time when the hand of Jesus touched me as a young student at Montreat College or the first time I kissed Ellen, which was, for me, totally intoxicating. And I have held on to those experiences because I find strength and inspiration in them.

¹ Mark 9:1

² 2 Peter 1:16

³ Strong's Concordance, # 3168 *megaleiotés* (meg-al-i-ot'-ace): splendor, magnificence,

When Peter saw a glimpse of God's glory in the face of Jesus, he desperately wanted to hold onto it, protect it, and make a permanent place for it.

The Reverent Marshall Jolly, an Episcopal priest in Western North Carolina, commented:

"We can relate to that, can't we? We've all have had mountaintop experiences with Jesus—a particular church or a particular church service; a place of retreat and refreshment, a treasured conversation, or maybe a favorite spot in nature—tender places where God knits our souls back together again, and we feel refreshed and more whole."⁴

Similar things are supposed to happen to some degree whenever we take time out to seek the face of God. Climbing a mountain is no easy task. Taking time away from earthly distractions and hindrances on a journey to a place where the air is clean, and the atmosphere raises our sights to new vistas takes time and effort. Being in such a place is like having a veil taken off our eyes, and we can once again hear the voice of God. We are all hungry to see afresh God's light that breaks through the darkness with "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁵

Peter, James, and John needed to glimpse this beauty when they were overwhelmed by the predictions of Christ's suffering. Even as Jesus "endured the cross for the joy that was set before him,"⁶ the disciples also needed a glimpse of his glory, which would also enable them to endure the harsh realities that would accompany their journey with Christ as he set his face toward Jerusalem, where he would be betrayed, arrested, and crucified.

⁴The Reverend Dr. Marshall Jolly, *Sermons that Work*, 2023,

⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:6

⁶ Hebrews 12:2

At this particular time in our Church calendar year, we are just about to descend into the valley of Lent, where we will hear the much-needed message that we all must pick up our cross and deny ourselves again. For most of us, such themes are a hard pill to swallow. But here, on this mount of Transfiguration, we can see a vision of such transcendence that the “sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”⁷

Visions of such glory are meant to sustain us when times get hard. Therefore, we need to set the stage where this can happen. One of the main lessons of our Gospel today happens as Peter’s first response to the manifestation of Christ’s glory is to get busy and build something. I have a similar temperament. I love being active. But God the Father interrupted Peter (just as he often does with me) when he said, “This is my beloved son; listen to him.”⁸ This is the message we continually need to hear.

But setting the stage for spiritual listening takes effort. And often, we need the help of a spiritual director to help us with this. In Margaret Guenther’s book “Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction,” she says, “Setting the stage for spiritual listening is much like being a host who offers hospitality.”⁹

Whenever Ellen and I have people over, we usually use it as an opportunity to do some housecleaning, and most often, there is a great deal of clutter that needs to be cleared or dumped. But no matter how inviting we make our home environment, there are also inner preparations before we can offer ourselves as gracious hosts. Spiritual listening takes a similar effort.

⁷ Romans 8:18

⁸ Mark 9:7

⁹ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Paraphrased, p. 1

Anxieties, fears, and feelings of unworthiness, along with a whole host of other things, need to be confessed and brought to the feet of Jesus before authentic listening can take place. We all face obstacles of various sorts. Sometimes, it may feel like all hell is arrayed against us. Some have admitted that just getting to Church with children in tow is a tall order. But this is where the journey for most of us begins.

*“In some ways, this is what we do each week in our pattern of worship. We come here each week, gathered in community, to meet Jesus in Scripture and Sacrament. But we can’t stay here. Just as the procession leads out of the Church at the end of the liturgy, and we are charged to ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,’ our work is to follow Jesus out there into the world, wherever he might lead.”*¹⁰

This place is where the real work of transformation begins, for whenever we behold the glory of the Lord, we cannot help but be changed by it. It will strengthen us to bear our cross and transform us into his likeness from one degree of glory to another. So let the glory of the Lord be revealed in you, for you are destined to be changed by it and live to the praise of His glory. For “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”¹¹ Amen.

¹⁰ The Rev. Dr. Marshall Jolly, Sermons that Work, 2023

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 3:18