

Brilliant Foreshadowing

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Luke 9:28-36

“...the appearance of his face change, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Movement 1 – Seeing the Glory of God

It is a powerful thing to witness the glory of God. It is an amazing, wonderful, life-changing, powerful thing to witness the glory of God. Can you think of times when you experienced God’s glory? It was those times you found yourself saying “wow” because something greater than you just happened. Or you just witnessed something that spoke to a greater experience than the normal

Often we think first of nature, of sunsets and waterfall, of canyons and mountains, of flowers and beasts all showing us in their own way the glory of God. They are reminders, or maybe examples of God’s glory in creation. When we see these slices of nature, we wonder and we muse, what a God it is that created these things. We say to ourselves, what a powerful and amazing God it is that gives us such wonder and glory. Theologians from Thomas Aquinas on say that in the natural revelation we see the supernatural revelation of God. In nature, God’s glory is revealed.

Or maybe we see the glory of God in actions of people. In good acts and in decent acts we see the goodness of God reflected; we see the glory of God. When someone goes out of his or her way for someone else, when someone shows compassion, mercy or peace without expecting anything in return, these actions reflect the glory of the nature of God. Just last week, the children and their parents took Valentines to Rosemont Retirement Home to give to the residents. In the giving, I saw individual’s faces brighten, I saw smiles form where there were once frowns. I saw the glory of God. Or last month when a number of us went to Norristown to serve lunch I saw people working and preparing food, laughing and sharing, and growing together. I saw people from this church reach out to the guests with a hand of decency and respect. I saw the glory of God.

We all can think of examples of when we have seen the glory of God. We all can think of moments when we stopped and said, “Wow!” We can remember the times when we were awestruck, when we were dumbfounded, and when we had to sit down because the power of the moment was so powerful and so great. When we look at a great piece of art, when we hear a powerful and moving poem, or when we listen to music that reaches into the depth of our very souls, we realize that we are brushing with the holy, with the divine, with God. Like rays of the sun cutting through the clouds of life and striking us right in the eyes causing us to squint, and causing us to look away. This is the glory of God. It is a powerful thing to experience the glory of God.

One would imagine that if you were walking and listening to and living with Jesus, one would get used to seeing God’s glory on a daily basis. With each miracle, with each profound teaching, with each moment of power, the disciples were witnessing God’s glory, and maybe they had gotten used to it. They had seen Jesus feed thousands, they had witnessed Jesus calming the wind and the sea, and they had experienced Jesus healing that which could not be healed. They had seen the glory of God. Yet today, when Peter, John and James went with Jesus to pray, they saw more than they were used to seeing. They were caught off guard with this revelation and this glory. This was more than a healing or trick with the wind and the water, this was the revelation of the true nature of Christ. This was a voice from above, this was a vision of Elijah and Moses, this was a brighter, a more focused look at the glory of God shining through Jesus the Christ. We have only caught glimpses of this kind of glory when Jesus was baptized, but only with a voice and the Spirit. The light, the transformation, the fullness of Christ was not there. This is more than they had seen before, and will not see again, until Jesus ascends to heaven (perhaps the exodus Moses and Elijah are speaking of). The fullness of Christ is revealed so purely that his face changed, that his clothes became dazzling white. This was more than

the disciples could prepare for, this was more than they expected. This is the glory of God shining through the person Jesus.

We can only imagine what it was like for the disciples to see this revelation. We can only imagine what it must have seemed like. Take all the sunsets, all of the mountain tops, all of the good deeds, and of the innocence of children, all of the profound paintings and powerful symphonies and wrap them all together and we are beginning to scratch what it might have been that the disciples saw. I can only imagine the disciples stopping and just saying, “Wow.”

It was a powerful moment. It was a breath taking, an awe-inspiring, a dumbfounding moment that must have cut into the very depth of the disciple’s experience and expectations. It must have been and it still is a powerful thing to witness the glory of God.

Movement 2 – Reacting to God’s Glory

How do we react to that glory? What do we do after we are struck with the powerful, blinding light? What do we do with the power and the awe that has profoundly affected our living, and our lives? How do we react? What do we do with that glory?

Peter, the one who always seems to speak quickly, without thinking, suggests that they build three huts for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Peter is suggesting that the moment be captured, that the moment be enshrined and be immortalized with human structures. Peter is trying to control the moment, to remember the moment, and to translate it into something that can be touched, experienced and remembered by humanity. We may scoff at Peter’s foolish response. We may look down at Peter with the historical hindsight giving us the surety that we would be right. We may even say, if we were there we wouldn’t make the same mistake, we wouldn’t say such a foolish thing. If we were there we would have just stayed silent and avoided the wrath of God. Maybe so, but probably not.

How many shrines have we built in an effort to capture an experience or a moment when we have brushed with the glory of God? How many monuments have we created? Europe is littered with churches and shrines built around a supposed event or experience or person. In Jerusalem there is a shrine around the place where Jesus is supposed to have ascended; there are churches around the location where Jesus is supposed to have been crucified. We have our shrines our monuments and our huts.

Washington D.C. is littered with shrines, monuments and memorials trying to capture a historical moment, the charisma of an individual, or the power of a movement. If you go to Ford Theater you will find a civic shrine in the box where Lincoln was assassinated. The Lincoln memorial is a “hut” to try to capture the power and the magnificence of one of our greatest presidents. We have tried to capture the glory of an individual. And maybe this isn’t so bad with our civic story. Maybe this isn’t a negative thing with the story of our nation, but if we react this way with secular events, is it not a far leap to imagine us creating shrines, temples and monuments for religious events? Let us not be too quick or too harsh to criticize or condemn Peter, for I think he is speaking for the desire and the reaction we all have when seeing and witnessing the glory of the Lord. It is our reaction, it is our nature to take a powerful moment and put it in a box to make it manageable, easy to remember, and accessible.

We have our huts that cannot be seen with stronger walls than anything tangible. We explain the moment. We offer a doctrine for the glory. We offer proofs, we offer theories and we offer a rational explanation for the glory of God.

In researching for this sermon, I found countless amounts of explanations for the transfiguration. Some were trying to explain how the three disciples could have had a shared vision. Some were trying to explain why the vision is slightly different in Matthew then it was in Luke. Some were trying to explain the theological depth to the transformed nature of Christ. Theories to give us a safe approach and a comfortable understanding of the

transfiguration are in abundance. This powerful moment in scripture is often explained away by the scholars and theologians.

Yet I think we have gone farther than just this story. The whole of scripture has been placed in a box. Scripture reveals to us the person and nature of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is a living revelation. We read scripture and experience the glory of God in the reading and the hearing of the holy stories. Yet in reaction we are given theories and methods to reading scripture to keep it manageable and under control. We must read scripture as infallible and inerrant. We must read scripture as historically true or historically false. We can't take scripture to seriously or not seriously enough, and we surround the Word with human words, murmurings and theories. We make a hut for the revealed glory of God and place the Word in that hut.

Or we experience God's glory through the revelation of Jesus Christ, and we build a doctrinal hut for Jesus. The incarnation must be understood in a specific way. The crucifixion must be understood in a specific way. The resurrection must be understood in a specific way. Christ atoned for our sins, or Christ showed us a way to live, or Christ justifies our salvation. We build our doctrinal huts for Christ and offer little room for flexibility and ambiguity.

Even in the church we have built our huts. I would say that here, in this church we have experienced and witnessed the glory of God. Yet it is so easy to build our own doctrinal and traditional boxes. The way we have always 'done' church, the way we have always understood ourselves as a church are the ways in which we will continue to be a church. There are acceptable things to do as a church and unacceptable things. The church can become a hut, a doctrinal and liturgical shrine closing in and keeping safe the revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

What do we do with the glory of God? We may wish otherwise, but our nature, our inclination is to follow Peter's suggestion and put God's glory in a box to open on occasion and experience only in a safe and controlled way. What do we do with the glory of God? How do we react to the glory of God? We control and force and shape the hearing and the interaction with that glory.

Movement 3 – Called to Listen

Yet here, in this case we are told what to do. The disciples are called to listen to the revelation. The disciples are awakened from their sleepy stupor and shocked into following the will of God. The disciples are told to listen to Christ. A voice from a cloud speaks and we know it is a voice with divine authority. This has happened before, this audible theophany; on the top of Mt. Sinai (except in that case it was lightening), in the thunder and the silence to Elisha, from the clouds in the baptism of Christ, some may even say the voice to Paul on the road to Damascus is a similar pronounced directive and now here, on the mountain, a cloud surrounds the disciples and a voice is heard saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

The revelation is expanded and explained. Through the mighty words of God, depth is added to the vision of the disciples. At first Peter and the others did not get it. At first they just saw Christ surrounded by Moses and Elijah and did not make the full connection. They just wanted to capture the moment in a neat and tidy way, but God would not let them walk away from this moment, from this experience without fully grasping what was happening. The moment is explained and the disciples are given instructions, "listen to Jesus."

It is like have a work of art explained and illuminated. It is having the nuances and the subtleties of a great piece of literature opened to be fully experienced. It is having the intricacies of a sports play explained. With the explanation, your appreciation and your experience of the moment is expanded. You see it beyond the surface.

In the early nineties, the artist "Coolio" came out with a song called, *Gansta's Paradise*. I remember sitting with some High School students who knew the song well, but never really listened to the words. They mouthed them but they did not say them. We spent an hour listening closely to the words, analyzing the words.

We listened to the song by Stevie Wonder, *Pastime Paradise*, upon which the song is based. We listened to the song and the power of the song was revealed.

In this revelation of Christ on the mountain, God gives us the key, God calls us to listen. God calls us to listen to Christ. Christ is surrounded by Moses, the one from whom the law comes, Christ is surrounded by Elijah, the one who is seen as the key representative of the prophetic tradition and we are told to listen to Christ. We are not told to put Christ in the tradition of the law or of the prophets, but as the one who holds both in the most perfect and complete way. We are to listen to Christ. We are told who Christ is in the fullest, the chosen, the beloved one of God, and we are to listen to him. Not just the revelation of the transfiguration is explained, but the revelation of Jesus Christ is explained. We are to listen to Christ.

Movement 4 – The Shift from Doctrine to Ethics

We are called to listen and to live rather than just believe. We aren't called to put Christ in doctrinal boxes; we aren't called to control our understanding of Christ. We aren't called to be sure that we get all of the particulars of our faith just right. We are called to listen and to live. I don't mean you shouldn't believe. I don't mean you shouldn't have faith. What I mean is that we aren't called to get stuck on all of the details of who Christ is and what Christ does. We are called to listen.

It starts with a choice to follow Jesus. It starts with a choice to believe that Christ is someone important enough, powerful enough to follow. We may not know exactly why, but we follow anyway. We suspend our questions and our doubt and we follow Jesus. It is that moment when you stop thinking and just act. It is that moment when you stop analyzing and just experience. When you read the bible, don't worry about how you read, or what it means, just read the bible. Let the narrative wash over you, let it effect your life. Listen to the words in the text and let them effect and guide your life.

This is a strong thread of the Baptist movement. We don't have creeds. Historically we don't have doctrinal litmus tests that one has to ascribe to in order to be a part of a congregation. Even if you look through history and find confessions, they are documents of reaction. They are documents saying, this is how we have understood ourselves, and this is how we have been living. They are not constricting and confining documents forcing a specific doctrine or theology upon Baptists. They are descriptors giving an explanation of the Baptist movement. Yet today there are churches that require a doctrinal test to be passed. Key questions are asked to be sure if someone has the "correct" understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ. When clergy get together we listen for the right kind of language, for the right hints to know that this clergy or that clergy ascribes to the 'right' understanding of Jesus. We want to make sure that we will fit in each other's huts for Jesus.

When we read the Bible, some claim that there is a "right" reading of the text. Some claim that this wonderful revelation of God's relationship with us needs to be understood in a specific way, and we are put through tests and inquisitions to make sure that we will fit into each other's huts for the Bible.

This isn't listening to Jesus! This is listening to each other in order to trap each other. This is an attempt to tear down each other's huts while building up our own. This isn't listening to Jesus. But we are called to listen to Jesus, to live the story of Jesus. The theologian George Lindbeck, says that instead of arguing what it means to be a Christian, we should focus more on how one is to be a Christian. We are not to explain the story but to live the story, and let doctrine and belief fall where it may. We should not focus so much on what others believe about Jesus, and more how one talks about, and lives that life of Jesus. Listen to Jesus, not to the pastors, the theologians, the pundits of polemics or the orators of orthodoxy. Listen to the story of Jesus in the Gospel. Listen to Jesus and live what you hear.

Movement 5 – Doing Lent, not Believing Lent

Listen to Jesus as you live your life. Let this revelation of Jesus be the foundation of your life – let it be the melody of the song that you sing. Sing of Christ the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Sing of Christ,

the one who shows us mercy and love. Sing of Christ, God incarnate. And then may you live the life that you sing about in your song. Let your actions show the revelation you have experienced in Christ. Not the doctrine you believe, but the love you experience. Not the dogmas you ascribe to but the faith that lifts you up. Let your actions sing of your relationship with Christ. Repeat the melody that Christ sings – love for neighbor, accepting the outcast, sharing with the needy, taking time for prayer. Sing the song that Christ sings and live that song.

This is the last Sunday before Lent. This is the final Sunday before we begin the forty-day journey to Jerusalem. I understand that Lent is still new for many of us, especially those of us who have been raised Baptist all of our lives. Some of you have already asked me what Lent means. Some of you have asked me what one is supposed to believe during Lent. Maybe you are wondering how Lent is supposed to effect your faith. I am going to ask you to suspend the questions of particulars, of doctrine and of ideas. I am going to ask you to do Lent. Don't worry about understanding Lent, just do Lent. Let Lent be a part of your song.

Doing Lent means constantly looking to the cross. Doing Lent means constantly asking yourself how you may have contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus. Doing Lent means examining yourself and asking if you still need the grace of God today. Doing Lent means focusing on your relationship with Christ. Doing Lent is not studying theological treatises, it is not building monuments for Easter, but walking with Jesus in a deliberate way to Jerusalem and to the cross.

Do Lent and you will find out that it is just a part of doing Christianity. Asking for forgiveness is not special to Lent, but part of our relationship with Christ. Looking to our relationship with others is not to be relegated to one specific time, but is a part of our relationship with Christ. Doing Lent is being a Christian. Do Christianity and you will naturally do Lent. I am just asking you to be a little more aware of the way you are listening to Christ.

Listen to Christ, follow Christ and let your life sing your song of Christ, and you will live in the way that Christ calls us to live. The more you sing, the more you will find that you can do nothing else. The more you let the melodies of Christ flow through your life, the more you will find that you can sing nothing else. You are a Christian, you are a follower of Christ. You can't explain it, you can discuss the particulars of doctrine, but you can show your faith. You listen to Christ, you walk with Christ, and that is all that you can do. Live the life you sing about in your song of Christ. The song of love, of acceptance, of forgiveness and of grace. This is the song of Lent, this is the song of Christ.

Movement 6 – Eyes to the Glory

As we go to the cross, remember the glory that we have seen. This is the powerful, the capturing and the redeeming power of this revelation – that the glory will carry us through. Let the melody persist in your heart. When you face the difficulties, turn back to the song that has captured your life. When you find yourself slipping and becoming lost, look to the light that shines in your life. When you feel you can no longer sing, let Christ sing for you, let Christ carry you until you can walk again on your own. Remember this revelation, this glory as we head into Lent, as we head to the cross and as we go into the world.

This revelation is not just for here and now, but is a revelation of what is to come. It is brilliant foreshadowing of the full glory of the Lord. It is the moment when the law and the prophets become complete in the actions of Christ. It is a revelation of the glory of God which is, which was, and which is to come. Remember the glory and hold to the hope that we are headed to a fullness of that glory.

AMEN