

“Perceiving God’s Glory”

Luke 9:28b-35, Colossians 1:15-20

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Luke 9:28b-35 MSG The Transfiguration “Jesus climbed the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John, and James along. While Jesus was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with Jesus. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over Jesus’ exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Peter and those with him were slumped over in sleep. When they came to, rubbing their eyes, they saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him. When Moses and Elijah had left, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Peter blurted this out without thinking. While Peter was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: “This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him.”

They became deeply aware of God and God’s glory. Mountain tops are wonderful places. The air is fresh, free from smog. The view is glorious. On a mountain top you gain an entire new perspective able to see more clearly where you have come from and where you are going. On the journey up the mountain every nonessential ounce is left behind.

Scripture often tells of mountain top experiences where one perceives the glory of God. Where one is filled with the fresh invigorating air of the Holy Spirit. Where one experiences glory. Where one can look back and perceive how God has guided their life and look forward with hopeful confidence to the glory God will reveal through your life. Every nonessential ounce shed makes the journey easier. Letting go of sin and guilt. Letting go of hurtful words spoken to you. Letting go of crippling expectations. Letting go of fear, hate, and jealousy. Letting go of pains and mistakes. Letting go of anything that dulls your senses, hinders love, or diminishes the glory of God.

Lent begins in three days on Ash Wednesday. Lent is a 40 day journey of letting go so we can let come the glory of God. Easter is a mountain top upon which we celebrate one facet of God’s glory, the resurrection.

Jesus transfiguration, shining and glory; Moses symbolizing that Jesus fulfills every demand of the law; Elijah symbolizing that Jesus fulfills all the predictions of the prophets; talk of the exodus from slavery to abundant life in the Promised Land, exodus from sin and death to the abundant life of eternal love, resurrection and the glory of heaven; the disciples going from sleep to becoming deeply aware of God; the disciples set free, receiving the glorious light, being transformed and inspired to shine with God’s glory. Any one aspect of that is challenging to understand let alone all of it. Barbara Brown Taylor explains it as “thin places”, a moment where you perceive God, “places where the veil between this world and the next is so sheer that it is easy to step through”, places where the door between this world and the next is cracked open and the glorious light floods into us. Barbara says. “There is no shortage of epiphanies in this world.”

Peter's gut reaction was to memorialize the thin place, to build it up, to protect it, yet Jesus took the disciples back down the mountain and pointed out thin places in every moment of their life. God's glory, transfiguration, and radiant light is accessible every moment to all of us in our ordinary daily life.

Perhaps we have memorialized some of scripture's thin places to the point that they no longer seem relevant to us today. Scripture is full of thin places, of encounters with God. Moses was a down on his luck fugitive tending sheep for his father-in-law, the only person who would give Moses a job. Moses once had a vision of greatness yet his temper resulted in him brutally murdering an Egyptian. Overwhelmed with failure, Moses spent most of his time wandering the wilderness caring for sheep. Moses experienced a thin place, the glory of God, through a burning bush. Now it certainly could have been a bush on fire or it could have been a sunset behind a common bush that caused Moses to think about God's love and God's desire for all people to be free to experience God's love. The pillar of fire that guided the Israelites by night and the cloud by day could have been a supernatural fire and a cloud hanging in the sky by God, or perhaps God used the eruption of a volcano to guide them.

Jacob, the scoundrel and cheat, could have had an actual physical wrestling match with an angel who physically hurt his hip, or perhaps, Jacob's guilt caused him to toss and turn in his sleep, perhaps he finally became aware of all the hurt he was causing and this caused him to limp to his brother seeking reconciliation.

Perhaps the lazy runaway Jonah was swallowed by a fish and three days later spit up by Nineveh. I have no doubts that God certainly could have done that, however maybe Jonah's babbling that the storm was God punishing him freaked out the sailors and they threw him in a life boat that the winds blew to Nineveh. What about other thin places? A sick Job, who lost everything, finding comfort in hearing God through a whirlwind. Jeremiah, a depressed person, yet able to reveal God's plan through illustrations involving common objects. Mary, a humble, scared girl, yet she heard an angel that inspired her to live her life saying, "as you wish" to God.

Thin places are glorious. God's glory is way to awesome, way to wonderful, way to holy, magnificent, spectacular, loving, joyous, splendid, grand, amazing, astounding, awe-inspiring, incredible, breathtaking, marvelous, and surprising to understand so we tend to memorialize the moment. What do you believe? Do you believe God used supernatural events in these situations or did God use common, ordinary things and experiences to fill people with God's glory causing them to shine with such radiance that we have memorialized the supernatural event rather than celebrating God's glory that filled them?

I believe God's glory is all around us. I believe thin places are everywhere. I believe God is shining light into our lives from every angle. Sometimes, life fatigues us, causing us to sleep walk. We are like the disciples, we can miss some of God's glory because our heads are weighed down with fatigue, or our sight is distorted. Sometimes we are weighed down with so many burdens, struggling so hard that we miss God's glory. Lent is a season to let go of the burdens, climb to the spiritual mountain top, rub the sleep from our eyes and let light envelope us becoming deeply aware of God and God's glory. We when experience God's glory it will be too wonderful to put into words, so we will babble and want to stay in that moment.

Listen again to the transfiguration. **Luke 9:28b-35 MSG "Jesus climbed the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John, and James along. While Jesus was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with Jesus. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over Jesus' exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Peter and those with him were slumped over in sleep. When they came to, rubbing their eyes, they saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him. When Moses and Elijah had left, Peter said to Jesus,**

“Master, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Peter blurted this out without thinking. While Peter was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: “This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him.”

Lowell Streiker said, “We tend to approach the story of the Transfiguration as though it were a Steven Spielberg movie about UFOs. We focus on all that is strange and wondrous. And, in the process, we push it away from ourselves as exotic and bizarre. No special effects, no spirits of the departed, no voices from heaven, no glow-in-the-dark apparel, no radiant faces for us. Peter, James, and John were content to be spectators, avoiding the call to radiate glory themselves. But Jesus wouldn't let them get away with it. They were about to discover that each of them possesses "all the elements of a unique and original adventure. Where is the glory? The glory is in the adventure. You see, every time there is a story of faith, it is completely original. God's creative genius is endless. God never resorts to mass-producing copies. Each life is a fresh canvas on which God uses lines and colors, shades and lights, textures and proportions...never used before."

We are more than spectators. We can also perceive God’s glory and shine with God’s glory. Each person’s perception of God’s glory is unique. You can perceive God’s glory in a bush, volcano, fire, smoke, dream, whirlwind, lifeboat and on a mountain top. You can perceive God’s glory in scripture, in stars, friends, a hot beverage, a baby, a song, a tree, family, snowflakes, prayer, art, a blade of grass, pets, a book, worship, video game, a committee, sport, a favorite food, a team, a flower, a candle, a wild animal, rock climbing, a hug, a shower, a glass of water, silence. God’s glory is all around us. God’s glory is in us. God’s glory is in your love, laughter, talents, joy, gifts, personality, abilities, service, creativity and uniqueness. Open yourself to perceive God’s glory so you can shine.

C.S. Lewis describes personal transfiguration as knowing God causing poetry to replace grammar and gospel to replace law. Longing transforms obedience as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.

The transfiguration reveals that Jesus is God, human life is precious to God and God is shining glory into our lives. The Apostle Paul put it this way. **Colossians 1:15-20 NLT Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. Jesus existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through Jesus, God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. Jesus made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through Jesus and for Jesus. Jesus existed before anything else, and Jesus holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. Jesus is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So Jesus is first in everything. For God in all God’s fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through Jesus God reconciled everything to Godself. God made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.**

Scripture describes David as a man after God’s heart. Perhaps this was said about David because he enjoyed singing about God’s glory. The psalms are David’s songs. David sings about God’s glory in a tree growing by a stream that bears fruit, a shepherd, a starry night. David sings about God’s glory that comforts him in distress, that brings some good out of a bad situation, and that heals his hurts. David sings about God’s glory that enables him to sing, to serve, to be forgiven, and to grow into a better person. As one reads David’s psalms you perceive God’s glory everywhere.

We can keep the transfiguration at a distance by building a memorial, believing that the supernatural only happens to a select few and trying to explain it, or we can celebrate the transfiguration by looking for God’s glory all around us and in us and by striving to shine with God’s glory.

Each person perceives and reveals God's glory in a unique way. For Thomas Merton, God's glory is his desire to please God. Thomas often prayed. "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing." Amen