

Mark 9:2-9 – The Shape of Glory

Jump back a few verses in Mark's Gospel, you will find that just prior to the Transfiguration, Jesus had been telling His disciples how He would **"suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."** Mark insists that Jesus spoke plainly and not in parables or images. Peter insisted that this was not going to happen as Jesus had said. Jesus had to rebuke Peter and insisted that Peter's mind was not on the things of God but the things of man.

Then our Lord calls to His disciples and the crowd, **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."** So it's no wonder that Peter said **"It is good that we are here"** – of course the mountaintop is better than the cross. Both for Jesus and for Him, at least in Peter's mind. He was terrified of that future and wanted an escape. His mind was not on the things of God but on himself alone.

St. Peter is no different than you or me. He wants to live. He hopes to live an easy life, a happy life, a long and well-lived life. He has hopes and dreams for himself and his family and he is not sure he wants to give these up in favor of a cross shaped future. You are just like him. I am as well. We do not want to follow Jesus. We want Jesus to follow us. We do not want the future Christ has prepared. We want Christ to make possible the future we have envisioned. We are not ready to lose our lives – not for Jesus and not for any cause – and we are not so confident in the future that God has prepared that we are ready to exchange what we want for what Christ promises.

Peter is uncomfortable with the prospect of the future Jesus spoke plainly of. Even the vision of Christ's unveiled glory does not ease the doubts of the disciple. In his shock, the voice from heaven speaks directly to Peter: "Listen to Jesus, My beloved Son."

Peter was not ready to surrender Jesus to the future of the cross and he was not ready to follow Jesus in that future, but Elijah and Moses were not so hesitant. They had been chomping at the bit waiting for the one who would fulfill the future they had prophesied. They did not shed tears for the cross that was before Jesus nor did they shrink back from its consequences. Though Elijah wrote not a word in Scripture but his whole life was a prophetic testament that pointed to this Jesus and to this future. No prophet would hold Jesus back. They pointed Jesus to the future they had proclaimed by the power of the Spirit.

Moses, who wrote a third of the Old Testament, was also not going to hold Jesus back. He had waited with anticipation for the One to whom all the Law looked to fulfill that Law and release humanity from an expectation they could not fulfill. It was now or never in their book. Jesus had come for this moment, for this cross.

Peter and James and John may not have been ready but Elijah was and so was Moses and so was Jesus. He had come for this, to fulfill His Father's saving will. And the Father urged the disciples to look away from everything else and look only to Jesus. Only then would their fears subside. And so it is for you and for me.

"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." It was another rebuke to St. Peter. "Stop listening to the voice of your fears and listen to Jesus." Stop listening to men and listen to God. As long as Jesus was merely flesh and blood, the disciples were comforted. But the prospect of the unveiled glory was not comforting at all. We understand this well. As long as religion is predictable and reasonable we get it. Shape up your lives. Be a better person. Try harder. We all get that. We have heard it from our moms growing up. But the prospect of radical grace is shocking. What kind of love would suffer for sinners? What kind of God would save those who had rejected Him? What kind of glory is revealed on a cross?

It may seem odd that Jesus warned them not to tell anyone what they had seen. Why wouldn't Jesus have them talk about what they had seen? But what they had seen was only one part of the glory of God. The rest was yet to come. They would see God suffer and bleed, cry out and die, and in this terrible moment, the world is redeemed. We

are always more comfortable with the glory of the mountain than we are the glory of suffering and death. But the mountain is not the full revelation of the glory of God. Good Friday is. Easter is foolishness unless Christ has died. It does not erase His suffering but delivers the consequences of that suffering to a people who have grown far too comfortable with death.

The Transfiguration of our Lord reminds us that God's glory is accessible only in Jesus and in the places where He makes Himself accessible to us. We do not ascend to that glory but God descends to us. He reveals that glory not in an escape from a cruel life but in the determined march down the mountain, into the valley of the shadow, where He is raised up on a cross to draw all men to Himself. The cross is not a detour. It is the destination.

You and I are much like Peter. We are weary saints who have tasted too much suffering and who just want an escape. We think that the glory of God is to find us a way around the troubles and trials of this mortal life. Instead Jesus has forged a path right through it. And He bids us follow Him. Come to the mountain and walk into the valley. Set your minds on the things of God and not on the things of man. Do not try to protect your life from suffering but empty that life into the suffering of Christ and you will find it. Such a future is so fearful that only the Spirit can lead us to the cross and see God's glory and only the Spirit can guide us to a cross shaped life of loving God and loving our neighbor.

This is not some happy movie script in which everything works out in the end. This is not about working out our problems and overcoming the obstacles in our lives. No, indeed.

This is about the Law that hangs on us like an impossible burden and about the sins which weigh us down even more. This is about the hope and promise of the prophets who were persecuted and even killed so that we would not walk in darkness but in the light of the Lord. This is not about a virtual life or a dream world but a real life and an honest world in which threats stir up fear and sin stings and death brings sorrow. It is about life lived in the valley. But not alone.

Listen to Him. These are the words directed to St. Peter and to each of us. Do not listen to the false promises of the world or the lies of the devil. Do not listen to the feelings inside you for they ebb and flow and do not remain the same. Do not listen to the opinions of those who think they know better than you. Listen to the voice of God in His Word and meet Him in the glory of His Supper. This is the voice that will not abandon you. This is the voice that will not lose you to the endless maze of detours and dead ends. Listen to Him.

On Wednesday we will leave the high mountain of Transfiguration and go down into the low valley of Lent. We will walk with Jesus to the cross where He will be betrayed into the hands of sinners, suffer in our place for our sins, and die for us that we may live. This is the glory of the Kingdom of God. The Lord dies for sinners. From the Transfiguration on, the disciples will behold Jesus as He is, the Son of the Father, begotten and not made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. To fulfill all the Law with a righteousness big enough to cover every sinner and to die on the cross to end the terrible reign of death. They saw Jesus as He was and is, as He would be on Good Friday and as He is on Easter Sunday.

The Transfiguration is not an alternative glory to balance out the cross but the once and eternal glory of God. In a split second, the unveiled glory is glimpsed by mortals and in it they see the cross. It is the unchanging vision which the Holy Spirit holds before us all the days of our lives, until we see Him as He is, face to face. Listen to Him. Set your minds on the things of God. Live the holy life God has made possible by your new birth of water and the Word. Strive after all that is good and right and holy and blessed, made known by His Word. Do not disdain the way of the cross but live its pattern in your life. For you have now become the beloved of the Father because you live in Christ by baptism and faith.