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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
2 March 2025

Sermon on Luke 9:28-36

Sermon Theme: “A Glimpse of God’s Glory”

1. Let Us See Your Glory!
2. Let’s Stay Here Forever!
3. Down from the Mount

What would you give for **a glimpse of God’s glory**? Do you ever think about that when you’re reading God’s Word in your devotion time at home or hearing and studying his Word in Worship and Bible Class? We hear the powerful accounts of the Old Testament and we wish we could have been there to see them! The prophets of the false god Baal completely humiliated and discredited when fire fell from heaven and burned up God’s prophet’s soaking wet sacrifice and even the stone altar it was on, proving that God is the only true God. [1 Kings 18] Or to see the waters of the Red Sea thrown apart with a bone-dry safe path right through the middle of it for God’s people to safely cross, only for the sea to then come crashing down wiping out Pharaoh and his Egyptian army. [Exodus 14] Maybe you wish you could taste the miracle manna bread from heaven [Exodus 16] or witness a child brought back to life just because a prophet of God prayed for it. [1 Kings 17] What would you give for **a glimpse of God’s glory** like that?

For Jesus’ disciples and so many others, that’s how they thought about God’s glory: big miraculous events which brought down the house every time they were retold! Unforgettable moments in Old Testament history when the power and majesty of God was clearly on display for the world to see – those were the days the disciples longed for. Of course, they did get to see some amazing miracles while Jesus was with them, and God even performed miracles through the disciples themselves after Jesus ascended back into heaven.

But today they were struggling. The context of Luke chapter 9 is important for understanding Jesus’ transfiguration. Our section for today begins, “*About eight days after he said this...*” So we wonder, “After he said what??” Jesus had asked his disciples, “*Who do the crowds say I am?*” They gave a few common answers, then Peter came through with an answer only God could have given him: “*You are God’s Messiah.*” Finally someone understood who Jesus really is!

Or maybe not. Jesus explained that being the Messiah wasn’t about the big, grand, and glorious life the disciples envisioned. Rather, “*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*” At this point, both Matthew and Mark record Peter pulling Jesus aside and asking if he is out of his mind; that’s not what the glory of the Messiah is supposed to be! He was supposed to deliver and free the oppressed people of Israel! He was supposed to do awesome miracles like they heard about in the Old Testament! They wanted more **glimpses of God’s glory**! “You can’t DIE, Jesus – that would be all wrong!”

Do we wish to see God's glory like that too, daydreaming about the miracles found in God's Word or wondering what it would be like if God actually did the miracles we ask him to do? "God, remember that time you healed someone's cancer? Can you do that again for me or my loved one?" "God, remember when you promised to throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessing on your people? Can you do that? We really need it!" "God, remember when you said you are always with us? Can you prove it with a sign or something? Because sometimes it doesn't feel like you're here at all." **Let us see your glory, God!**

But who are you to demand such a thing? Who am I to think I can talk to God that way? The Bible clearly tells us who and what we are, and we prove it every single day: we are sinners. This is much more than just words we say at the beginning of church; it's a sad but undeniable truth. We disobey God in more ways than we can count. Instead of learning from our sins and mistakes, more often we see other people's sins and simply get new ideas for our own. "Oh, that looks fun; I'm going to try it too! I know God says I shouldn't, but maybe just this once." Then "just this once" turns into "just once more" until we're in a dreadful cycle of repeating sin and disobedience. Words that come out of our mouths, hate we hold in our hearts, evil actions we do, good actions we refuse to do, the doubt and despair we allow to control our lives, the unbelief we have every time something doesn't go our way. Then we who have disobeyed God, refused to listen to his Word, and even rebuked him for what he says and does... we have the nerve to demand **a glimpse of God's glory**, the way we picture it. How dare we! How many times will we try to be the god of God?! GOD is God, not us! And he proves it. After Jesus explained what his true glory would be, *he took Peter, John and James and went up a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.*

Jesus had rebuked Peter after Peter rebuked him, but now at the top of this mountain, it almost looks like Jesus changed his mind. Maybe the whole "going to Jerusalem" thing wasn't so appealing after all and Jesus was tired of hiding who he really was. It was time to take off the veil that had hidden his glory for so long and finally let the world see the real him, shining as brightly as a flash of lightning in the sky! Finally, **a glimpse of God's glory!**

But Jesus' disciples had two disappointing reactions to this. The first was that they were so "excited" to be alone with Jesus on top of this mountain, that they were on the verge of falling asleep! Time with Jesus was no longer as unique or special to them as it had once been. They had become so familiar with Jesus that being around him was ordinary and normal, so instead of joining him in prayer to the Father, they let Jesus do his thing while they nodded off.

The second reaction was, not surprisingly, led by Peter. *When they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* The sleepy disciples were suddenly awakened by an intense bright light. As they rubbed the

sleep out of their eyes, they realized that light was JESUS and two men standing with him. Did they jolt awake and stare in awe? Could they even look for more than a second or two? As they realized what was happening, Peter's response was beyond enthusiastic. "YES!! Now THAT'S what I'm talking about, Jesus! This is the glory we want! *Let's build some shelters* and **Let's Stay Here Forever!!!** We want this great glory to never end!" Then *a cloud appeared and covered them. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."* Jesus shining with bright majestic glory, two of the greatest prophets in history standing by his side, and the voice of God the Father himself speaking in a way they could hear and understand. Does it get any more glorious than that?!?!

Sadly, you and I are quite familiar with both reactions the disciples had. We are often guilty of being so used to time with Jesus that he no longer excites us or even holds our attention. We yawn and sleep our way through our time with him, stare pointedly at our watches, let our minds wander, wonder what we'll eat for brunch, think ahead to the game on tv later, and fret about all the time we're wasting here since we still have so much to accomplish today. But is Jesus really that unimportant to us? So unimportant that all we can think about is when our time with him will be done so we can get back to everything else we have to do. Perhaps we should ask ourselves...if moments like this – time spent with JESUS himself – are not the highlight of our day and week, what is?

Or maybe we have the other reaction, and we are still excited by Jesus and eager to learn about him, but only when life happens the way we want. We snap awake and come to attention when the big and glorious things are happening, mentally high-fiving Peter as we also stare wide-eyed at the glory in front of us. If that's what gets us excited, perhaps we need to seriously ask ourselves: Which is worth being more happy and excited about – when God does what WE want, or when God does what HE wants? I sincerely hope we prefer when God does what he wants, because that is always the best thing possible. We probably realize that reacting like the disciples did is not a great idea, but maybe we also think it's not that big of a deal. We want **a glimpse of God's glory!** What's wrong with that?!

That's when we need to learn that the greatest glory is not the miracles God performed in the Old Testament, nor the miracles the disciples desired, nor any of the personal expectations you and I have for God. In fact, the greatest glory of Jesus' life was not in any of the moments we most expect. We and the disciples see the shining Jesus, prophets of ages past, and the Father's thundering voice, and we think, "This is it! THIS is the greatest glory of Jesus!"

But it isn't. Jesus' transfiguration was not the highlight of his ministry or the goal he came to accomplish. He came to display his glory in a much greater way. The most glorious part of the Transfiguration account is when Jesus looked like his normal human self again and proceeded back **Down from the Mount.**

Objectively, he was not a bit less glorious in that moment than he had been a moment before. Jesus still carried with him all the glory of God, but his glory was best on display when it was hidden, for then Jesus could continue his true mission and purpose for coming into the world: accomplish everything necessary to be our

perfect Savior from sin. John shares this beautiful truth at the beginning of his gospel account, words we often hear at Christmas: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. 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] The most glorious thing Jesus ever did was come to our world as truly God and truly man, bringing with him all the glory of God in a way that sinners could finally see. In the Old Testament, God made it clear that no one could see his glory and live [Exodus 33] Sinful people can't handle the holiness of God! But in Jesus, we can and we have seen his glory, because Jesus came to take away the only thing standing between us and God – sin. With our sin forgiven and gone, the reason for our separation from God's glory is also gone! *The Word became flesh, and we have seen his glory!*

We may wish to see God's glory in our own ways, but God's way is always best as he freely shows it in the person and work of Jesus our Savior, who perfectly accomplished his mission and won salvation for us. There is no greater glory than the glory of God revealed in Jesus. The disciples had never before seen Jesus shine like he did on the mountain that day; but they HAD seen God's Messiah, doing the work he came to do, a glorious promise fulfilled.

Moses and Elijah had never seen glory like that either – and they saw a lot! The examples of glorious Old Testament events at the beginning of this sermon were all moments in either Moses' life or Elijah's life. Yet the greatest glory they ever saw was the flesh and blood of the Word of God, Jesus the Savior of all.

Therefore, we don't need to wish for **a glimpse of God's glory**; we already have far more than that! We see the glory of God every time we open his holy Word and hear again the comforting truths of our Savior who lived, died, and rose for us, truths we will focus heavily on during the upcoming season of Lent. So don't **stay here forever** on the mountaintop with Jesus. Instead, praise God that Jesus hid his glory again in order to display it finally and completely on another mountain called Calvary. Our glorious Savior came **down from the mount** and *resolutely set out toward Jerusalem.* [Luke 9:51] As we will sing just a little later in our service:

Then hail the double glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
and let the wondrous story full peace and joy afford!

The holy mount acclaims him the majesty divine;

Mount Calvary proclaims him Redeemer—yours and mine. [CW21 #388 st. 5]
In heaven, we will have much more than just **a glimpse of God's glory**; we will stare at the face of God's full glory forever and ever, joyfully praising him for saving us! Thank you, Lord Jesus, for revealing your glory in the most wonderful way as our perfect Savior from sin and the winner of our eternal salvation! Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.