



Transfiguration Sunday
“Look! The Sight is Glorious!”
March 6, 2011

Oh what a sight it must have been! To stand in the presence of God and to meet God face to face. Not only to STAND in the presence of God – but to be able to live to share the experience later, and to remember it!

For the Israelites camped out at the bottom of Mt. Sinai, they were not sure what to expect. They only knew that something was different. In that different, they were experiencing a god unlike any they had encountered in Egypt. The gods in Egypt did not bring about fire. Sacrifices may or may not have been eaten by the priests depending on what day it was or who was on duty. Nor did the sound of the voice of these gods sound as booming and as strong as thunder regardless of close thunder or thunder in the distance. The gods of Egypt had not led the Israelites out of Egypt and into this unknown territory.

On top of it, this God, this unique God who not only led the Israelites out of Egypt, who was also the same God who had been feeding them, (and which god of Egypt had done that again? – oh, that’s right, that would be the Pharaoh, a human ruler who worked them hard and provided little), was now asking this entire group of people to be in a relationship with Him.

The stakes seemed to be a bit lopsided: God wanting to be in relationship with the Israelites : a group of people who had no idea what they were saying ‘yes’ to; a group of people that had called out to the Lord for help – only to have the Lord hear their cries, and deliver them. A group of people who could later agree they would worship the Lord and serve the Lord as one – only to disagree just as quickly on what that meant and how that was to be done. Those were indeed what the stakes appeared to be.

Yet the stakes in the relationship went deeper. To show how deep the stakes went, the Lord invited three key leaders from Israel to have dinner with him on the mountain. Sharing a meal together is common in any relationship. It provides a chance to talk with another person, to share, to laugh, to relax, and to enjoy one another’s company. Moses was about to receive the commands and the law of God to be shared with the rest of the Israelites as the code for living. But not just “any promise” of how the Israelites would live. No, these were specific – given by God, written both on tablets of stone, and upon the hearts of the Israelites.

Now, Moses is being told – by God – to come up to the mountain. No one had ever been so close to this God before. God is now asking Moses to do that which has never been done. It seemed unthinkable!

It is unthinkable, that one such as Moses should be able to see the face of God and live. Even today, it is unthinkable, that any of us should be able to see the face of God and live! Our Sunday School children will sing in the 10:30 service a song that reflects seeing the Lord: “We have seen the Lord; God is merciful. We have seen the Lord; God is powerful; We have seen the Lord; God with us, Jesus Christ.”

Oh what a sight it must have been! Peter, enjoying the moment of being on the mountaintop, seeing Moses and Elijah with Jesus, **and** in the glory of the Lord, is at a loss for words. In stunned awe, Peter says the first thing that comes to his mind, “How good Lord, to be here! Let us build three booths and stay here!”

We cannot fault Peter for his enthusiasm and excitement. Seeing Jesus transformed in God’s glory was indeed a sight to see – provided one could catch a glimpse of it. Jesus, shining, brighter than the sun, brighter than the sun hitting the snow on a winter day, more dazzling than anything that had ever been seen before. In the midst of Peter’s enthusiasm and excitement, Peter was not thinking about the actual time it would take to build three temporary shelters. On the pragmatic aspect of things, supplies are needed. Peter, James, and John need to return from the mountain to get the supplies, and then go back up the mountain. This could take longer than Jesus has time for!

Even before Peter can begin to think of measurements for these temporary shelters, he is interrupted. Not any voice, but a majestic voice announcing Jesus as the beloved Son of God. The voice continues, ‘this is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased – listen to him!’

In fear, the disciples fall to the ground. Jesus comes to them, and helps them up, assuring them to get up. As they look, Moses and Elijah have disappeared. Jesus is standing before Peter, James, and John. The disciple’s eyes readjust to the brightness having gone away also. As they recover from what they have seen, Jesus says the unthinkable: ‘tell no one about this until later.’

Later?? The most incredible thing that has happened, and nothing is to be said about it until a later time?? I am not so sure what would leave me more speechless – the sheer incredible delight of seeing the glory of God, or the request to not share this experience with anyone until a later time.

When we experience the glory of God breaking through our lives, there are times it can indeed seem like a mountaintop experience. We see God ‘up close and personal’ as it were. Not only do we see it, but we feel it, and can sense God is present. We try to explain it to others, only to find ourselves at a loss for words. We may use words such as “awesome”, “wonderful”, “amazing”, “incredible”. We may find ourselves using a lot of energy to describe the experience. The words we use merely strike the surface of the experience, so that, like Peter, we may find ourselves wanting to relive or go back to the moment.

However, there are times where the glory of God breaking into our lives sneaks up on us unaware. It can catch us off guard, showing up where we least expect it to. It may not have been what we were expecting, and we may miss it. Or, it may hold our attention, leaving us wondering, and thankful.

Several weeks ago, I was having “one of those mornings.” The sky was gray – that gray that indicates the weather is going to be cold; blustery; the kind of morning that can leave one wondering whether or not spring will ever come. As I turned on to May Post Office Road, I saw the sun begin to come up. A small ray of light began to break through. I rounded a curve, and then I saw it: one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen, a sight that took my breath away. In the field down and next to the road was a coating of frost. The frost covered every single blade of grass. Every limb on the young trees had a layer of frost. Every berry glistened as though it had been rolled in sugar. It was beautiful!! It was also one of those moments where I wished I had had my camera with me. Whatever had been on my mind vanished when I saw the field covered.

Jesus did not want the disciples to share of their experience until after Jesus had been crucified, died, and risen. Neither were the disciples ready to share their experience. Six days earlier, Jesus shared with the disciples what would eventually happen to Him: how he needed to go to Jerusalem, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. It was a message the disciples did not understand at the time.

Peter may have been trying to protect Jesus, to prevent his earlier words from happening. Jesus, on the other hand, provided Peter, James, and John with both a visual and auditory affirmation of who Jesus truly is. This affirmation would sustain Peter, James, and John in the difficult days to come.

Shortly after 2011 began, we remembered the Baptism of Our Lord. During the reading of the Gospel that day, we heard the story of Jesus being baptized. We also heard a voice from heaven, declaring, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Today, on Transfiguration Sunday, we hear again of a voice from heaven, declaring, “this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”

Today reminds us, that the little baby boy born in the manger, the one we proclaim as Emmanuel, God with us, the one whose birth we celebrated a few short months ago, is indeed the Son of God. This Son of God came into the world, in order to complete God’s plan of salvation – death on the cross in order that we might have eternal life.

Today is a turning point in the life of the church. As the extended eight week season of Epiphany comes to an end, our eyes turn to the cross, hearing again God’s words of affirmation over Jesus. Hearing these words again provides us with comfort and strength for what is ahead.

We may try to skip the solemnity of Lent and move right into Easter. We cannot have Easter without Good Friday. We cannot have Good Friday without Maundy Thursday. We cannot have Maundy Thursday without Palm Sunday, and we cannot have Palm Sunday without the birth of Christ. All of which are part of God’s perfect plan of salvation. All of which remind us, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” All of which remind us what a glorious sight it is to see the glory of God breaking into our lives in ways we least expect it to.

May God grant us the courage to see God’s glory throughout our lives and our days. Amen.