

Last Sunday after Epiphany, Transfiguration: February 11, 2024 – Mark 9:2-9

THEME: The Glory of the Son

The big game is today, the Super Bowl. Two teams have reached the pinnacle of the season, and they will play one final game for all the glory. This event is packed with all sorts of glory-getting gimmicks. The halftime show is a flashy performance that seems to grow each year. Businesses spend millions of dollars to advertise for seconds, hoping to come up with the best commercials. And when the game is over, the winners are showered with glory – through confetti, champagne, trophies, partying into the night, a parade in their city.

This is a prime example of how the world thinks of glory. Our culture seeks fame, popularity, attention. We are trained to strive for success, for more money, for followers. But today in our Gospel, we see Jesus striving for a different kind of glory. He comes to a pinnacle near the end of his earthly ministry. In the transfiguration, we see the glory of the Son, God's one and only beloved Son. **We hear the call to listen to this glorious Son, and we look ahead to his glory.**

This account comes about a week after Peter made a bold confession: "You are the Messiah." Jesus preceded to tell his disciples what they should expect. Their teacher, the Messiah, was going to suffer, die, and rise again. Peter wouldn't have it and tried to rebuke Jesus for speaking this way. But Jesus rebuked Peter! He didn't have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns. Jesus continued by telling his followers that they would have to *take up their crosses*. He meant that being a Christian wouldn't always be glorious as the world thinks of glory. In fact, it often involves sacrifice and suffering.

This sets the backdrop for our Gospel account. Jesus took his three closest disciples privately up a mountain to pray, and while they were there, Jesus was transfigured. The Gospel writers describe how his appearance was changed as his divine nature was on full display – he was dazzling white, brighter than the sun in the sky, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach something. This sudden, unexpected radiance was more than the disciples could handle. They fell on their faces, terrified and at a loss for words. Then, Moses and Elijah, giants of the Old Testament that they had heard about in worship, appeared and talked with Jesus about his departure.

Peter felt the need to insert himself into the discussion. He said, "It is good for us to be here." Well said, Peter! But why? Did he want to sit and learn at the feet of these wise men? Was he in awe of God's glory and just trying to take it in? Or was he trying to avoid the suffering that Jesus talked about for as long as possible? That's really why Jesus revealed his glory – to strengthen his friends for the challenges ahead. Then, another voice entered the conversation. Just as we began Epiphany with this proclamation from heaven, the Father speaks: "This is my Son, whom I love." This time, he adds, "Listen to him." The disciples were constantly listening to their teacher. Why did they need this reminder? We can see how Peter experienced weakness just as quickly as he made a bold confession. He didn't always have in mind what Jesus wanted him to understand. After this, Jesus was going to be doing some of his most impactful teaching. Listen to him, disciples!

We need this encouragement, too. How often are we distracted by human concerns? You sit in the hospital, and as soon as you receive the terminal diagnosis, you are overwhelmed. Your car breaks down, but you don't have the savings to fix or replace it. Marriage and family relationships take hard work and patience, and some days it feels like more than we can handle. In our busy society, there's always another task to finish. Our minds are filled with human concerns. Remember, Christ told us we would have crosses to bear. But when we face these challenges, we might be tempted to push back. Have you ever heard someone say, "I thought being a Christian would make life easier," or "I came to Jesus to get help, not to suffer *more*"? Do you think those things yourself? The glory that the world offers is enticing, especially when we look at the pains we bear. Sometimes, it feels like we just need a win.

When our enemies the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh try to drown out the voice of the Son, we need this reminder: Listen to him! We've seen Jesus revealed this Epiphany season. He is the one who helps and heals his people, who has all authority over those enemies, who calls us to follow and to invite others in. Now, we see this glimpse of his glory and have even more reason to keep listening! Hear the promises God's beloved Son makes. Jesus promises to prepare a place for us where there is no more pain or suffering or tears. He knows that we will have trouble in this world, but Jesus says, "Take heart! I have overcome the world." In his final victory speech before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

When we are attacked, these words are our strength and shield. As you carry the crosses Jesus gives you, remember the glory of the Son, and listen to him.

After the Father made his proclamation from the cloud, the disciples looked around. Just as suddenly as Jesus was transfigured, they were alone again, just Jesus and the three disciples. As they went down the mountain again, Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone what had happened. What?! Not share this incredible experience with the crowds, with family and friends, not even the others from the Twelve? But Jesus was clear. They were not to tell anyone until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Jesus didn't want the disciples to focus on this momentary glory because he was going to show his glory again in a public, powerful way. He wanted his disciples to look ahead.

In many of our Transfiguration hymns, we sing about how Jesus came down from that Mount of Glory to go up another Mount of Glory. Before they went up, Jesus predicted his suffering and death. Not long after, he would predict it again. The Messiah had his mission firmly in mind. Instead of dazzling white clothes and a radiant face, Jesus would be stripped bare and dripping with blood. Instead of being surrounded by his closest friends and those Old Testament heroes, he would be abandoned, even forsaken by his heavenly Father. Who would look at him hanging on a cross and think, "That's true glory! This is the beloved Son!"

It doesn't make sense to the human eye. But with the eyes of faith, we see him in glory as he dies. If we didn't have this gift of faith, if we didn't trust in God's plan, we would be blind to the glory. The gospel about Christ is foolish to our human hearts. But praise be to God for working through His Word and Sacraments to shine light into our dark hearts! Now, by faith we see the love of Christ on the cross. That love led him to take our place, to be punished for us, to set aside his glory and become sin for us. He has completely forgiven all our moments of doubt and worry over human concerns. He accomplished the will of God so that his perfection has become ours. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

By faith, we also know that the glorious Son did not stay dead but rose again. Now, *this* is a win that brings ultimate glory! Sin and death are defeated! Christ stands victorious! With the assurance that comes from the resurrection that we too will live, we can look even further ahead to another Mount of Glory – to Mt. Zion, Jerusalem, God's holy city, heaven. Paul talks about this glory that awaits us. In Romans chapter 8, Paul says that our present sufferings – as real as they are – they aren't worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us. Through faith, we are co-heirs with Christ. This means we share in his sufferings, yes. But we also share in his glory – the glory of the one and only Son of God! In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says that these perishable, mortal bodies we have now will be raised in the end as imperishable, powerful, glorious bodies. Even though our sins are like scarlet blood that stains, we shall be made as white as snow. We are going to be among the multitude dressed in white robes standing before the throne of God, as radiant as Jesus was on that mountain.

There was a young boy sitting in the back seat as his dad drove through dense fog at night. The son wondered how his dad knew where to go. He could hardly see anything. He felt concerned as he peered out the windows. But the dad assured him, with the headlights breaking through the fog and pointing the way, he could stay on track. The glory of the Son, brighter than any high beam, points the way for us. Listen to his words for guidance and comfort as you walk through the darkness of this life. He will lead us to see his glory as we keep looking ahead.

Today marks the transition from Epiphany to Lent. We will rightfully worship with a more solemn attitude as we acknowledge our sinfulness that Christ bore as he willingly suffered for our sake. But we see the glory of the Son in this season too. Our Savior moved from the Jordan River where he was baptized to this mount of Transfiguration. We follow his final days again as he moved from this mountain to that other Mount of Glory, Calvary. We listen to him. His words are enduring comfort amidst our suffering and sorrows. These promises bring us lasting peace and joy. And we look ahead, both to see his glory at the cross and in his resurrection, and finally to see that glory that we will share with him in heaven. Take heart, dear friends. The glory of the Son is yours. In Christ, we win. Amen.