

Transfiguration Sunday – Year A
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Exodus 24:12,15-18
Pastor Paul Horn

February 3, 2008

Faith

Come to the Mountain & See the Glory of the LORD

¹² The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.” ¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Today is a special day, especially if you are from New York or Massachusetts. Tonight your team will play for the National Football League championship. There’s much glory to be found in the Super Bowl. All the players are after the prestige of being the best in the world. But whether the Patriots or the Giants win, how long will their glory last? In 20 years they’ll be nothing more than a question on a sports quiz show, “For \$200: Who won the Super Bowl in 2008?” The players’ bodies will be worn out from years of abuse; knees will be sore, backs will be aching and some other group of young men will be in the hunt to earn that same glory.

What about Jesus? He too had a moment of glory on the mountain, but it only lasted for a short while. But there’s a big difference between Jesus’ glory and any glory we might try to gain in this life. He has all glory. He is glory in its fullest sense. He is God from God, Light from Light. And yet he doesn’t come flaunting his glory. Instead he hides it. He conceals his glory throughout his entire earthly life, with the one exception of that event on the mountain where the curtain is pulled back and the true glory of Christ shines through.

This morning we travel to another mountain, hundreds of miles south of the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. Today we stand with 2 million Hebrews in the Sinai desert at the foot of a mountain range. Just three months earlier this vast nation had marched confidently away from their oppressors, the Egyptians. As they left behind a life of slavery they anxiously looked ahead to their new home, promised to their forefathers over 400 years ago. But their dreams were put on hold as Pharaoh and his army pursued the Israelites, having changed their mind about losing cheap slave labor. In an awesome display of power the LORD protected his people. He made his presence visible with a large pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He kept the Egyptian army in check while he parted the Red Sea in two, creating a dry pass to the other side. When the Jews arrived safely on the other side, the LORD allowed the chariots, horses and infantry of Egypt to march through the Sea. And then the hand of the LORD let go of the sea that he was holding back.

Now as the Israelites stand at the foot of Mount Sinai, they again witness the mighty Glory of the LORD. The LORD exhibits his glory in awesome splendor. It's a special occasion. He is about to give his Law and commandments to his people, to set them apart from the other nations. He will give his people special ceremonies to perform and a unique place of worship, all of which would point them to the Messiah. The LORD invites Moses to climb to the top of the mountain. As he does the visible presence of LORD that led them out of Egypt now descends on the mountain in a cloud that looks like a consuming fire, with crashes of lightning, earthquakes and billows of smoke. I'm sure that Moses couldn't help but be taken back several months earlier, as he stood on that same mountain range and the Glory of the LORD appeared to him in the form of a burning bush and promised him, **"You will lead the people out of Egypt and will worship God on this mountain."**(Exodus 3:12) No wonder Moses later said of this experience, **"I trembled with fear,"** (Deut 9:19). No wonder the Israelites shook with terror as they beheld this awesome sight. Any recognition that they may have attributed to themselves due to their recent exit from Egypt was quickly squashed. Their crowning achievements all came from the Glory of the LORD.

It was 22 years ago last Tuesday that the USA looked forward to a crowning achievement. NASA was about to send the first private citizen into space, a female school teacher. However, 70 seconds after takeoff the hearts of millions of Americans stopped beating as they witnessed the space shuttle *Challenger* explode in the air. All seven on board perished. Glory and success were lost.

That's what the world glories in, isn't it? Success, riches, awards, notoriety... The problem is this hunger for recognition is ingrained into every human being through our sinful nature. The secular world only fuels this natural lust for glory. Even other religious denominations feed off of this inborn desire by teaching works righteousness; living a good life is necessary in order to earn salvation. And by incorrectly promoting decision theology; you must choose to accept Christ into your heart. Both teachings point to the individual's deeds. As Lutherans we humbly bow before the Word of God which tells us that it's all been done for us. But my dear friends, you and I are not exempt from the desire for glory. No doubt you've had a few crowning achievements in your life. While you probably have never been in space, you relish the fact that you can whip anyone at Halo3 on your Xbox, you know exactly how many fish you've caught or deer you've killed and how much they weighed. There are the trophies from various competitions, the good grades, the promotions in rank or position. Maybe you even glory in your children or grandchildren. But whatever the achievements you and I have attained, whatever the glory we are trying to seek, who gave you the ability to do those things? Who allowed you to win? How long will that glory last? Who will remember what you did in 2008? These words from the prophet Isaiah certainly humble all of us, **"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them."** (Isaiah 40:6,7)

On the Last Day we will stand on another mountain, Mount Zion, the place of God's throne. Like the people of Israel we tremble in fear; a natural reaction for sinners to have

as they try to stand with all their “glories” in the presence of an Almighty, all powerful and all glorious God. And God, seated on his throne, will turn and point to a set of stone tablets, and he will point out the first command on those tablets, inscribed by his own finger, and say, “I know that I commanded you to give glory to me alone, and not to steal my glory, not to give my glory to another, not to give glory to yourself.” And then we would expect him to (and he would have every right to do so) consume us with his fire.

But before he does you and I will turn and point to another mountain, Golgotha, where our true glory resides. Our glory is not in what we have done but in what Christ accomplished for us. Come to the mountain outside of the walls of Jerusalem and see the cross, that terrible instrument of death. The world would not define death as a crowning achievement in one’s life, especially if it is gruesome and untimely. The world glorifies the successes in one’s life. For example, this past year the world praised the lives of winery founders Ernest and Julio Gallo, former first-lady, Lady Bird Johnson, restaurant founder Bob Evans, designer and millionaire Liz Claiborne, famed football coach Bill Walsh. All these celebrities died in 2007. Each of the news networks had their own little tribute to the deceased and highlighted their successes. The news anchorman or woman would always end their memorial tribute by saying, “We lost a great one. We will miss you.”

The difference with Jesus is that we praise the accomplishments of his life and his death. Although he was true God and possessed all power, he lived in humility. He willingly set aside some of his power. He hid his glory. How many politicians or Hollywood stars hide their glory and power on purpose? Not too many. Everyone once in a while you see Jesus displaying power and glory, but not to flaunt it. He always used his power to glorify his Father. And instead of mourning the death of Jesus, we glorify him for it. His crowning achievement was won through his humiliation on the cross. Jesus accomplished salvation for you and all people by his death. He completed the payment for your sins of self-seeking glory. He earned the right to eternal life for you, all by his death. But we don’t need to end our tribute to Jesus with, “We’re gonna’ miss you, buddy.” We continue to give him glory for his victory over death by his resurrection! And His glory keeps on shining. He ascended into heaven where he was given all power once again to reign over the nations of the world. He will come again in glory on the Last Day to judge - when all people will have to recognize him as Savior of all.

The way Jesus gives you the accomplishments of his life and death aren’t very glorious in the eyes of the world either; simple water, simple bread and wine. But he attaches his powerful Word to these means of Grace and through the simple glory of his Word and Sacraments Jesus gives you his perfect, humble life, the payment he earned by his death and the victory he won by his glorious resurrection. And on the Last Day, as you stand before the throne, God will say to you, “Come to Mount Zion and live with me on my holy mountain.” There you and all believers in Christ will be glorified, not because of anything you did here on earth, but what your glorious LORD did for you. And there you will bask in lasting, eternal glory.

This Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of the season of Lent. For the next six weeks in our midweek services we will walk with Jesus to the cross. I'll be honest with you, you won't see the glory of your Lord, because we will focus on his betrayal, abandonment, sufferings and crucifixion. But as we witness how our Lord humbled himself for us, and what he endured for us, we will focus on our repentance. When we see ourselves giving glory to ourselves, then we will repent, and turn to the Lord, and come to the mountain to see the Glory of the LORD. My dear friends, in these next six weeks set aside your glory. Give credit to God for your successes and accomplishments. Seek to give glory to Him in everything you do. Come to the mountain often to see the Glory of the LORD.

Today it may be difficult for you to cheer for either team in the Super Bowl, because your team isn't in the big game. There's really no glory for you. But if you happen to be a rabid Patriot or Giants fan and your team is victorious, then you have every reason to rush outside your front door after the game and run circles around the front lawn cheering and yelling and annoying the neighbors. But that glory will soon pass. As Christians we have every right to stand up and cheer today, not to celebrate our glory, but Christ's. Come to the Mountain, and see the Glory of the LORD! To him alone be the glory. Amen.

*Come to Calvary's holy mountain, sinners, ruined by the fall.
Here a pure and healing fountain flows to you, to me, to all
In a full perpetual tide, opened when our Savior died.*

Christian Worship 106:1