

## Sermon: A Glimpse of Glory

Caldwell Memorial Presbyterian Church

February 14, 2010

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I have a confession: Although Valentine's Day is a secular holiday; it is one of my favorites. I admit. I am a hopeless romantic.

All week, we have been bombarded by the media to buy the gifts that would guarantee love: cards, flowers, perfume, candy and diamonds. Have you noticed an increase in ads for e.harmony.com assuring us that finding the right mate will bring eternal bliss?

And although Valentine's Day can be one of joy, a time when we reach out to family and friends with tokens of affection; for others, it is one of the saddest holidays of the year. For some, the question becomes (as Tina Turner would sing): "What's love got to do with it?" What **is** love but a second-hand emotion?

But today, we are here to talk about a glorious love, one that will not fail, even when we fail. When Jesus was asked: Which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: ***Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.*** For most of us, it is easy to say that we love God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. What's not to love!

And when it comes to loving neighbor, that might be a bit harder, and yet in I John 4, we find these words: ***Those who say "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.*** And we thought that loving God was the easy part.

These words of Jesus are often thought of as a two-part commandment (loving God, loving neighbor). But I would maintain that **this** commandment goes a step further.

What is most difficult for many is the part of the commandment that says that one must love oneself. For many, the thought of loving oneself

seems selfish, arrogant, and just plain undoable. We are too aware of our flaws, our imperfections, to be able to love ourselves.

And yet that is precisely what Christ would have us do. We are a part of God's creation. When we were created, God said, it was good! When we free ourselves of self hate and doubt, we open ourselves to greater love of God and neighbor.

God so loved us, that God sent Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross. And today, we are witnessing the transfiguration of the human Jesus to the divine Christ as he prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice of love. We are getting a foretaste of God's full glory.

Peter, James and John probably had no idea what they were getting into when they accompanied Jesus to the mountain to pray that day. Little did they know the wonder that awaited them.

But in reading this text, we knew it had to be something exciting. The text begins: ***Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.*** Mountain. Now when reading scripture, remember that when you see the word "mountain," watch out! Something big is about to happen.

In ancient Hebrew culture, mountains figure prominently in the contexts of worship, prayer and events of religious significance. A mountain is considered to be a holy place, a place where one meets God. It was on a mountain, that Moses received the Ten Commandments. The prophet Elijah went to the mountain to pray and was later taken to heaven in a whirlwind.

Jesus is on this mountain praying, but his disciples are sleepy. Here was our Lord and Savior, breaking through his humanity to divine form, and the disciples are missing it. When they looked up, they saw that Jesus was undergoing a metamorphosis right before their sleepy eyes. And we are told that Jesus' clothing was dazzling. These disciples were astounded, but they were able to get a glimpse of God's glory.

And there, appearing on that mountain with Jesus were two anointed ones--- Moses, representing the law and Elijah, representing the prophets. They were talking to Jesus about the role that Jesus would later play in Jerusalem, about his crucifixion, about his ascension.

O what a sight that must have been! Sisters and Brothers, if we want to get a glimpse of God's glory, like the disciples, Peter, James, and John we have to first wake up and behold. We have to open our spiritual eyes.

Too often we walk through our lives asleep, oblivious to the glory of God. We stumble around in spiritual darkness, not understanding that the light of Christ is dazzling. Just because we close our eyes, does not mean that the light is not there.

Sometimes we complain because we cannot see what the future holds. We are so busy worrying about the future, that we miss the wonder of the present, not realizing that God has provided enough light for the step that we are on. The glory of God is around us, in a rainbow, in the flowers, in the miracle of a newborn baby, in the faces of those we meet.

We can identify with Peter when he said to Jesus, "Master this is a great moment. Let us build three booths, three shelters, and one for you, one for Moses and one of Elijah. But Peter was missing the point. When Peter and his companions saw a glimpse of God's glory, they wanted to put it in a box. Peter was proposing a construction project. We can't blame them. Would we not want to stay in that mountaintop experience forever?

Have you ever had a moment in your life that was so wonderful that you wanted the moment to last a lifetime? Who can explain how the divine is present in everyday experience... when the extraordinary transcends the ordinary, times when we knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have been touched by God. You may have been in meditation or prayer, or listening to that favorite hymn, or contemplating the vastness of an ocean or felt that you were on the top of a mountain and you did not want to leave the mountain top for the valley below. But even in our valleys, we can have a mountaintop experience.

I am amazed as I watch scenes from Haiti where the people have lost everything, loved ones, food and shelter, and even in their valley experiences, they are rejoicing and giving God the highest praise.

And so we are told in Luke 9:34 that while Peter was asking Jesus to build a shelter that would house Jesus, Elijah and Moses, ***a cloud came and overshadowed them and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.***

*Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him.*

(In Mark’s account of the Transfiguration, we find God saying, *This is my beloved Son, Listen to him.*)

Listen???

How can we listen for God’s voice when we live in a world of chaos? How can we hear God’s voice when we have such a need for noise? Many of us can’t stand silence. As soon as we get in our cars, we turn on the radio. We open the door to our homes, and immediately turn on the television. We go for a walk on the greenway where Gods majesty in nature is all around us; yet we are talking on our cell phones.

Even in worship service, some of cannot resist the urge to send or receive a text message. And heavens forbid that we get caught in a situation of waiting with no book to read! If we have no outer noise makers available, then we entertain ourselves with minds full of negative chatter. We go though all of the things **we could** have done and what **they should** have done.

We pray and we pray and we ask like the Psalmist: *How long God? When will I hear a word from you? Lord, please give me a sign.* Often we are so busy talking or distracted that we would not see God’s sign even if it were printed on a billboard!

How then, can we open our hearts to see and to hear God’s words? Henry Nouwen, noted Catholic priest in his book, Life of the Beloved, has some suggestions for us:

1. Realize that like Christ, we are **chosen** by a God of love.
2. Accept that we are **blessed**, which allows us to hear that we belong to a loving God who will never leave us alone
3. Acknowledge that we are **broken**, sometimes with broken hearts and with broken spirits, and that even though we are we are not perfect, but we are precious in God’s sight.

4. And by understanding that we are taken, blessed, and broken, we can be freely **given** to serve God and God's people with love and joy.

**To be chosen, blessed, broken and given is to be transformed by the love of God.**

In our first scripture reading for today, we learn that this first century Church at Corinth had already forgotten that the Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ were all about Love.

Paul had received word about the misdeeds of the Church at Corinth and so he was providing this pastoral counseling in this letter to the Corinthians. He had heard that various members of the church were looking down on the poor among them with disdain. Some were boasting about having special gifts such as speaking in tongues as evidence of a higher calling. Some felt that they possessed unusual wisdom. The saints in that community of faith had become envious of the gifts of others. And there were even those who felt that they were already reigning with Christ in glory.

So Paul is reminding them that **Love** is the transfiguring and transforming power. Love is not boastful jealous, arrogant, rude, irritable or resentful.

**Love is patient and kind! Love supports, believes, hopes, and endures.**

Christian friends, each time we practice patience, kindness, and endurance with others, we show the glory of God. And each time we provide support for the children at Merry Oaks School, visit the sick, sing in the choir, serve as an usher, prepare food for others, take care of this sanctuary, we are giving a glimpse of God's glory. When we work tirelessly for peace and justice, for "A Room at the Inn," for the Crisis Assistance Ministry, for the Red Cross, for the people of Guatemala, we show forth God's glory until God comes again.

But like the church at Corinth, if God's work is done without love, it is all for naught. In order to avoid the pitfalls of the church at Corinth, we have to keep reminding ourselves: It is all about God's Love.

Transfiguration is not about living with our heads in the clouds. It is about being so transformed by the love of God that we are willing to act in the public square. It's not about staying in our mountain top experiences and building a shelter there. It is about going out to work among God's people in the trenches. The transfiguration is a glimpse of what is possible, not just for Jesus, but for all humanity

Being touched by the love of Christ is a transforming moment. Once we have gotten a glimpse of God's glory; once we have heard the voice of God saying, "You are my beloved;" once we have felt the love of God within our hearts; we can never be the same.

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. ..  
And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Amen*