
Glory Changes Everything!

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Last Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A**

“This changes everything!”

I wonder what else Peter, James, and John said to each other as they clambered down the side of the mountain...

“Did that really just happen? What did we just see? What did we just hear? How do we go back to normal after this? I don’t think we can! I don’t think I want to...”

There must have been a moment, somewhere on the way down the mountain, when it began to sink in that everything was different now. They knew what they saw. They might have questioned it later, wondered if their eyes had played tricks on them, interrogated their memories to understand its meaning, but they could not unsee it. They could not unsee the light.

Jesus, transfigured, was seared into their sight. How could they forget Jesus’ face shining like the sun, those blinding beams radiating divine glory? They remembered his clothes reflecting that glory, flashing white like lightning. Moses and Elijah appeared beside him, conversing with him, the Law and the Prophets together, the whole story of God converging in that one moment. It was as if the veil had slipped away, the veil that separates this world from the next, our reality from God’s, earth from heaven. The disciples had stood face to face with the glory of God.

What is the glory of God? It would be easy to mistake glory for spectacle – after all, the transfiguration is truly spectacular! And yet this mountaintop moment is not simply God showing off. God does not use glory like divine pyrotechnics to punctuate his power. No, glory announces the mystery of God’s presence. From the all-consuming fire on Mt. Sinai to the cloud that descended on the tabernacle and the temple, glory is the revelation that God is fully present, fully visible, fully with us. When we witness glory, our eyes are awakened to reality as God dreams it to be.

And if glory is God fully present, fully visible, fully with us, then Jesus’ transfiguration glory shows us what humanity looks like when God dwells with and in us. For a moment, the disciples see humanity’s fulfilled potential for relationship. They see a human life no longer held at a distance from God, but open, responsive, and alive in love. The glory they witness is not Jesus leaving his humanity behind, but a glimpse of humanity’s completion. In Jesus, the future is folded into the present. Beaming with light and love – this is what human life looks like when it is completely alive with God – whole, radiant, at perfect peace.

Have you ever caught a glimpse of glory? Maybe you’ve had a literal mountaintop experience, some breathtaking view of creation so radiating with beauty that you cannot help but see God’s fingerprints everywhere you look. Glory surrounds us in worship, when beauty steadies our attention and God’s nearness becomes unmistakable as we sing and pray together as the Body of Christ. Or maybe you’ve seen God’s glory interrupt your ordinary routines: some moment when life as it is suddenly discloses life as it is meant to be. Glory finds us around the dinner table, transfiguring a meal into communion, a moment of belonging, a foretaste of heaven shared with those we love. Glory finds us in moments of service, in holy encounter with the not-so-other, in unguarded moments where we see the truth that the kingdom of God does not run on usefulness, control, or merit, but on presence freely given and freely received. Glory finds us in beginnings and endings, in alleluias at the graveside and in the awe of seeing one’s child move for the first time in a sonogram.

The glory of God breaks through when heaven and earth briefly meet, opening our imagination to what humanity is meant to become in God.

And that is why the Transfiguration is so much more than just a spectacularly beautiful moment. Holy moments of divine encounter form us, shape us, inspire us to seek that holiness in our daily lives. Once the distance between heaven and earth has thinned, once God's presence has been made visible and unmistakable, we, like the disciples, begin to see differently. Peter, James, and John have seen what it means for God to be fully with us. They have seen what life is for. They have seen the world that is coming into being in Jesus. From that moment on, their eyes are trained by what they have glimpsed. After we encounter God's glory, life is no longer measured only by what is, but by what God is bringing into being. As we deepen our sight, as we train our imaginations, God gives us the faith to insist, again and again, on the fuller humanity we have been shown. God loves you too much for you to settle for less. The Transfiguration changes everything because glory teaches us how to see, opening our imagination to who we can become, and drawing us toward the life we have glimpsed.

In just a moment, you will witness a transfiguration, not with cloud and fire, but with water and word. Just as the voice from heaven named Jesus as God's Beloved, baptism names our lives as beloved. The same fatherly voice is heard again, now spoken over us. In this moment, heaven and earth draw near, and a life is gathered into God's own life, into Christ's body by the Spirit. What was revealed in Christ on the mountain - humanity alive in the radiant presence of God - is now offered here in the water, opening a future to be lived toward.

And like every glimpse of glory, this one reshapes how we see. Once God has drawn this close, life can no longer be imagined as though God were far away. Baptism trains our eyes and our hearts to see a human life as God sees it: claimed, held, and called toward fullness. We need that vision, that imagination. After we're done celebrating today's baptisms, when we've returned to our normal routines, we will find that the grind is still the grind, diapers still need changing, dinner needs to be cooked. And yet the ordinary is not just ordinary, but full of glorious possibility. Work, rest, joy, suffering, love, and loss are now lived within the eternal life Christ shares with us, under a word God has already spoken and will not take back: This is my beloved. The promise of love and life we see in Jesus' transfiguration stretches our imagination, drawing our desires forward and teaching us to live toward the future God has opened.

And this, finally, is why baptism changes everything. Not because glory lifts us out of our humanity, but because it opens our eyes to what our humanity is meant to become in God. Baptism does not remove us from ordinary life; it sends us back into it with a renewed imagination for what is possible. We go back down the mountain into the same lives, the same routines, the same unfinished work, but now with a vision of fuller humanity before us and a hope and faith that holds us fast.

Christ has drawn near and shared our life. God has spoken a word over us that does not fade. The Spirit remains with us, shaping us toward the future we have been shown. And from here on, life is lived in light of that glory, sometimes faithfully, sometimes falteringly, but always living trusting in our eternal belovedness. Take heart: you are God's beloved. Behold God's glory. This changes everything!