**February 19, 2023  Dazzling Hope**

This is the last Sunday after Epiphany and also known as Transfiguration Sunday - a day that we celebrate and see how God reveals His glory - to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Old Testament passage Exodus 24:12-18, we read “Moses on Mt. Sinai”.  Have you ever seen the glory of the Lord? As we talk about God revealing His Glory - it’s interesting to note all of the different ways in the Scriptures in which God reveals Himself. The Old Testament passage talks about how Moses was able to go up and speak to God face to face!

Now look at God’s Word in the book of Exodus for this Sunday! Moses was able to go into a more direct presence of the Lord and receive the Ten Commandments directly from God - putting them on tablets of stone. The glory of the Lord was so glorious that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai his face was so bright that it scared the Israelites!  When you think back on this example of God giving a great and glorious vision of Himself - it’s hard for us to envision.

How nice it would be if the Lord appeared to us like He did to Moses? To have the Lord pass in front of us as He did to Moses! I always used to think - “if God would appear to me like that – Oh! how I would be so encouraged to really serve Him! I wouldn’t worry so much about life!” And so we ask, “oh Lord, where is my burning bush? Where is my vision of your glory?”

What are the results of this thinking? People are flocking to the best visuals they can go to. Some will skip from church to church in search of the ultimate spiritual experience. They want to see the Lord! The problem is that we are not looking in the right places. We read in I Kings 19:11-18, when the Lord appeared to Elijah, he didn’t come in an earthquake or fire a mighty wind, but in the sound of a low whisper! Let us look at this passage in today’s terms.

Ephesians 6:17 says, the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Here we have people running here and there for every new manifestation of the Spirit - climbing up mountains and joining monasteries - looking for God. All the while they fail to realize that God Himself descends from heaven and reveals Himself in His Word. How often do we overlook the glory of God in the simple things of life - the Word of God on our shelves - the beauty of a mountainside - and the wonders of a new baby being born? It’s as if there’s a veil over our faces so we can’t see the glory of God right in front of us!

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 17:1-9) we read that the writer of Matthew gives his version of the event which we call "The Transfiguration of Jesus." Mark and Luke also write the account of this strange occurrence, with some minor variations in the telling. It’s one of those rare moments we were just talking about, one of those mountaintop experiences of life, which somehow defy adequate description and challenge us to stretch our concept of reality to the point that we usually wind up asking the question, "Did this really happen?" Events such as the Transfiguration somehow connect us with the mystery of creation and eternity.

For Jesus it was a time of confirmation and affirmation of his ministry. For Peter, James, and John it was a brief glimpse of the transcendent, a peek at the reality that lies just beyond everyday life. But notice that Jesus quickly led the disciples back down, off that mountaintop in spite of Peter’s desire to pitch a tent and camp there for a long while. Jesus led them back into the daily routine of teaching and preaching and caring for the broken and hurting people of the world they lived in, back to the reality of life in the valley.

And that leads us to ask another question: Is the mountaintop moment itself the ultimate reality, with its air of celebration and glimpses of glory? Is it the promise and hope of salvation, where every tear is wiped away? Or is it the fears and tears we encounter every single day we live? What is reality in the church? Is it our prayers and hymns of worship, our confessions of faith, and our hope of heaven some sweet day? Or is it our acts of kindness, words of encouragement, and other concrete expressions of our faith on ordinary days like today? "Reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact"? If you would like to know more about the Glory of God please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister