

Last Sunday after the Epiphany; February 19, 2023  
+ Matthew 17:1-9 +  
“Glory Sacrificed, Glory Shared”

**Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James; and he led them up onto a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured in front of them. His face was shining like the sun. His clothing became as white as the light. Just then, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.**

**Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”**

**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Just then, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.”**

**When the disciples heard this, they fell face down and were terrified. Jesus approached them and as he touched them, he said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.” When they opened their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Do not tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”**

With every paycheck, she could have more. He could buy better stuff and eat out at least once more at a nice restaurant. But instead of doing that, she allows a healthy chunk of his earnings to get carved off the top and land in a retirement account.

He could – and does he ever want to! – go three rounds at the dessert table. But summer is coming, and he wants to look on his trips to the beach. So he turns away after just the one cookie.

She could run around town with her friends on Friday and Saturday nights. And she wants to! But instead she stays in her dorm and studies. It is not fun. But she does it so that someday she will graduate – and maybe even do it in seven semesters instead of eight – and then succeed.

It goes by different names: delayed gratification; sacrifice for the future. But we know there are many places in life that we can choose to do without – or do with less – in the present, and reap the rewards in the future.

When Jesus stands on the Mount of Transfiguration, he has glory. He has a lot of glory. Matthew says: **His face was shining like the sun. His clothing became as white as the light.** So first the glory is visible in Jesus himself.

But then the glory starts swirling all around him, too: **Just then, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.** Moses and Elijah represent the entire Old Testament; the people at Jesus’ time call the Old Testament “The Law and the Prophets.” Moses is the great lawgiver, and Elijah is the great prophet. So Jesus has glory of being what the Old Testament is all about. All those laws about worship were about worshipping him! All the rules about sacrifices pointed ahead to the sacrifice Jesus is about to make! All the prophecies about the Messiah and his salvation of the world are about Jesus Christ. What glory, for all of the written Word of God to point to Jesus, to find fulfillment in him and his work!

But the glory keeps coming! The heavenly Father speaks from a cloud and repeats what he said at the very start of Jesus’ ministry: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.”** The

Father confirms Jesus' glory as God. He calls Jesus the holy Son who pleases his Father perfectly, who should be listened to because he speaks divine truth.

The glory of the light, of Moses and Elijah, of the voice of the Father is both beautiful and terrifying to the three disciples Jesus has brought with him. One of them, Peter, at first wants to preserve the glory: **Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."** Here St. Peter does something you can rarely accuse him of doing: he understates the case! It is not just good on the mountain. It is glorious up and down and all around.

And when they hear the voice of the Father from heaven, the glory becomes too much for Jesus' sinful followers. **When the disciples heard this, they fell face down and were terrified.** It is no wonder. There is only so much heavenly glory that sinful brains cannot process it all. It is beautiful, but finally it overwhelms them, too.

**Jesus approached and as he touched them, he said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."** The purpose of the glory is not to scare Peter, James, John. So when they fall down in fear, Jesus shows his love for them by coming to them, touching them, and speaking words of calm and comfort. He does not want them to be afraid of what they have seen. But he does want them to remember it; and he wants us to remember the glory of the mountain, too.

Why? **When they opened their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone.** Suddenly the glory was gone. And the closing verse of today's Gospel begins: **As they were coming down the mountain...** The disciples will need to remember the glory of the mountain – and so will we! – because Jesus lets it go. His face and clothes stop shining; Moses and Elijah leave; the Father's voice fall silent. And Jesus leaves the glory of the mountain to climb down with his disciples.

What they and we will see next will not only be inglorious, but it will be devastating and brutal. They and we will see Jesus rejected by his own nation, his own people. They and we will see crowds turn away from him as he teaches in the temple courts, watch him wrestle in prayer in the Garden, watch him betrayed by one disciple and abandoned by the rest, before seeing him arrested, abused, and executed in arguably the most humiliating and painful way the bent human mind has ever come up with.

The glory of the mountain is gone. Jesus lets it go and climbs down into deep shame, humility, suffering, and death.

But glory will come back. Jesus must humble himself now, and put his glory away. Because who would betray a man whose face shines like the sun? Who would arrest a man with Moses and Elijah in his entourage? Who would sentence to death and crucify a man with the voice of the Father booming above him? Jesus must humble himself for all and any of those things to happen. But the humiliation, the shame and suffering will end. And the glory will return: **As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Do not tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."** The glory must not shine through even in the words of Peter, James, John. But only until Jesus rises.

Then, the glory will return. The glory of the mountain will be told, and told, and told, and told for two thousand years at least. And Jesus' glory will return to himself on Easter morning. It will return when he returns to his Father's right hand in heaven to rule all things. His glory is back, and remains now and forever.

So should we see Jesus like a retirement saver, or an eschewer of cookies, or a steady studier? Does he put off the glory of the mountain now so that he can even greater glory in the future? Yes, but there's more to it than that.

If all Jesus was after was glory for himself, then why would he have ever come into this world in the first place? He would have stayed in heaven, where all glory was already his from all eternity. But for Jesus, the highest glory is shared with his people.

Jesus is about to humble himself, die on the cross, and then rise again. Through all that work, we share in his eternal glory. After our bodies give out, our souls will join him in heaven's glory. And our bodies will rise in glory, just as his did on Easter and live with him forever.

In the heart of Christ, the greatest glory is to give it to the ones he loves, to share it with sinners who otherwise would not and could not ever find it. This is why he leaves heaven's glory in the first place and lowers himself to come into our world. And it's why he leaves the glory of the mountain to suffer, die, and rise in glory: so we will have it, too.

This truth must strike us from a few different angles. Jesus' definition of glory – that its highest level is achieved when others are made glorious – convicts us. Because that is not our natural definition of glory. The sinful mind defines glory one way: recognition, power, and admiration for me and me alone. You will respect me and admire my success; I will reign over you and control you. To my sinful nature, glory will always be about elevation of me and me alone.

This sinful definition of glory shows itself in our lives not just in blatant bragging and self-promotion, but in more subtle ways, too. When I ought to share glory with others I hide their contribution. When I must the names of everyone who worked on the project, I will find a way to put mine on the top. ("Yes, I think this time we should do it alphabetically!" "But last time we did it reverse-alphabetically!" "Well, that's because Abramowski was on the team.") We see glory as this finite quantity that we must grab as much of for ourselves as possible, and more for others can only mean less for us.

Jesus does not see it that way. His greatest glory is to triumph and lift up not only himself, but others. So he sacrificed the glory of heaven, for a while. And he sacrificed the glory of the mountain, for a while. And when he got it back, he got it back better than ever – because he glorified us along with himself.

So now where will find our greatest glory? We find it in Jesus, of course. Our sins are forgiven. We are God's children. Heaven is ours, body and soul. No matter the level of recognition and respect we receive in this world, we have infinite glory in God's Son. And so, the respect and recognition we receive here is now much less important. It's not that we should deflect and decline any kind word spoken about us, or any recognition of our good work. But how much better to share it whenever possible, to give it rather than receive it, to sacrifice it in order to share it. Just like Jesus.

He climbed down from heaven and climbed down the mountain. He sacrificed glory for a while, to win it back bigger and better. Because he won it for us, too. Find your true and lasting glory in him and, like him, sacrifice and share your own. Amen.