

**2 Kings 2:1-12**  
**Mark 9:2-9**

**First Presbyterian Church of Delanco, NJ**  
**Transfiguration of Our Lord, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009**

### **God Clears the Clouds**

The story of the Transfiguration of Christ allows both the disciples and Mark's audience a glimpse of the true glory of Jesus Christ. God's voice at Christ's baptism seems like a distant memory dimmed by controversies and difficult teachings. Although words about future glory have been spoken, the persecution, passion, and death of Jesus are close at hand. This moment of glory allows Mark's audience to recall Christ's baptism and to anticipate the final triumph of God's Son.

Glory appropriately describes this scene. There are several features which work together to show the identification of Jesus Christ with God's own majesty. Location itself provides the first clue that a revelation of some kind is about to happen. The "high mountain" recalls the commission of Moses on Mt. Horeb and the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. The sudden and unexplained brightness of Jesus' clothing signals the presence of either God or God's agent. Witnesses describe a light not accessible to human beings. The appearance of Moses and Elijah not only exceed the limits of what usually seems possible but also connects Jesus with two of Israel's major prophetic figures. The overshadowing cloud recalls the divine presence in the cloud of the exodus and at Mt. Sinai. Anyone with even the faintest knowledge of Israel's history can recognize the divine glory being attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.

Six days after Jesus promises the coming of the Son of Man in the glory of His Father, God affirms His Son during the Transfiguration with Peter,

James, and John as witnesses. As God affirms Jesus for His ministry at the time of His baptism, God now prepares Christ for His suffering.

Despite the literally dazzling character of this story, nothing in it is particularly new or shocking for Mark's readers. Those who have read or heard from the beginning know already that Jesus is God's Son. We recall the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice at His baptism. We have read of His miracles and His teaching. The Transfiguration may intensify our understanding, but it does not radically change it.

Mainly, we identify with the three disciples. They too are to be prepared for the Passion of Jesus. Prophecies of suffering, rejection, and death seem to overwhelm their minds and souls. They desperately need to see what Christ means about His power and glory so they can break the hold of the fleeting moments on their own lives. Unless they share a vision of the joy which Christ sees, the disciples can never endure the Cross or despise the shame which awaits them as well. Kirkegaard cites a parable in his book, *The Gospel of Suffering*, in which he compares a rich man in his carriage at night, feeling safe because the lantern lights the dark which is close around him, but makes a fright of the blackness just beyond the rays of his lantern. In contrast, the peasant in his wagon has no lanterns but fixes his eyes on the stars, and see "gloriously in the dark but starry night."

God gives the three disciples a view of the stars which they will never forget in the dark days ahead. They are privileged to see the glory of the Transfigured Christ!

According to David McKenna, the glory of Christ witnessed by Peter, James, and John seems to have three parts. First, they see the glory of Christ's sinlessness. In vs. 3 we read, "And His clothes become dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." Even in his excitement, Mark chooses his words carefully. The dazzling to which he refers means outer beauty created by inner purity. He is not describing a laundry day miracle. In the glory with which God clothes Christ, the disciples are able to see Christ's sinlessness. Christ and Christ alone has the purity to take upon Himself the sins of the world.

Second, the disciples see the glory of Christ's Sonship. Vs. 4 says, "And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus." William Blake says, "Great things are done when man and mountains meet." On Mt. Sinai, Moses sees God face-to-face, and lives to bring down the tablets of the Law. On Mt. Carmel, Elijah calls down the fire of the Lord to consume his sacrifice and bring Israel to its knees before God. Now, on another sacred mountain, Jesus talks with the most renowned names in Jewish history – Moses, the giver of the Law and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets. Except for Peter's tongue, the disciples appear to be momentarily paralyzed. Peter rushes in and blurts out, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For the second time in a few days, Peter is talking when he should be listening.

It is God's turn to interrupt. Enclosing the small company in the cloud of His presence, God sets Christ apart by repeating His affirmation, "This is My Beloved Son." An unbroken line of love between God the Father and

God the Son joins together the Baptism and the Transfiguration as part of an eternal relationship. Never again will the disciples mistake Jesus for a common man. They are now witnesses to the glory of God's unequalled Son.

Third, the disciples see the glory of Christ's suffering. In vs. 7 God says, "This is My Son, the Beloved; listen to Him!" As long as Jesus preaches the Good News of the Gospel, the disciples accept His word as the word of God. But when Christ predicts His own suffering, rejection, and death, the disciples appear dumbfounded and become selective hearers of the truth. By God's command, "Listen to Him!" God erases any distinction between His revelation and the revelation of Christ. On that same authority, Jesus proclaims, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." From now on, the disciples know that every word of Jesus, whether they like it or agree with it or not, will carry the glory of unparalleled truth.

As quickly as the Transfiguration occurs, the glory is gone. Christ stands alone. He and He alone will walk the path of suffering for our redemption. The profound truths heard on the mountain are to be reserved for the hearts and minds of Peter, James, and John. Jesus commands them to "tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man has risen from the dead." Jesus Christ never ceases to amaze us. Like a fisherman casting his bait just beyond the hungry fish, Jesus predicts again His Resurrection – a strange idea for the Jewish mind.

If Mark's readers learn nothing especially new here, the disciples do. Peter, James, and John are not witnesses of Christ's baptism. As frequently

happens, Peter, in his excitement of the moment, becomes the spokes-person for the other disciples and suggests to Christ the making of three dwellings. Mark explains Peter just does not know what to say. So Peter's attempt to commemorate the occasion, despite his good intentions, reduces the importance of the event. It also contrasts sharply with his earlier rejecting of Jesus' predicting His own death. Peter rejects the suffering which will come imminently but appears all too eager to welcome Christ's glory. Peter does not yet realize glory does not come without suffering.

The words of God the Father from heaven are similar to those spoken at Christ's baptism but with a significant difference. At Christ's baptism, God says to Jesus, "You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased." Here God announces, "This is My Son, the Beloved; listen to Him!" God identifies Jesus Christ directly to the disciples and commands that they listen.

The importance of listening becomes clear in contrast to what has just been seen. The disciples see the Transfiguration of Christ, the whiteness of His clothing, the appearance of Elijah and Moses alongside Christ, the cloud which overshadows them. After the voice speaks, the disciples look around and see only Christ Jesus. Nothing is wrong with what the disciples witness, except they are not yet listening and hearing what Christ says to them. Until they listen and hear, they are not ready to understand what they have seen.

The Transfiguration of Christ not only recalls the heavenly voice at His baptism and anticipates His triumphant Second Coming, but Christ's Transfiguration also calls the disciples to listen to Jesus as well as watch His

deeds. The need to listen to Christ's words is emphasized throughout the New Testament. The disciples do not hear and do not listen which prevents them from understanding.

What Christ's disciples, and Mark's audience, are to understand is that Jesus is both the Son of God, a powerful agent of healing and subject of dazzling glory, AND the Son of Man, who will be betrayed and persecuted and crucified. In common with many Christians throughout the church's life, Christ's disciples want to have the glory that they can see without the message they are to hear. But the two cannot be separated. Mark repeatedly lifts up both aspects of Jesus' identity, relentlessly recalling that the suffering will lead to triumph; but the triumph cannot be had without the price of the Cross! The combination of glory and suffering lies at the heart of Mark's Gospel.

Many of us today undoubtedly feel the same as Peter, James, and John. We want to be a part of Christ's glory too. We want to see Christ's dazzling clothing, the brightness of the glory of God, the historical figures we read about in the Bible. But we have difficulty with the part involving suffering. Just as the disciples are witnesses to Christ's Transfiguration, as described in the Bible, we are witnesses too. Not necessarily of Christ's Transfiguration itself but of Christ's work in this world as a result of His Transfiguration. We are witnesses of Christ's glory through reaching out to others in our own faith community and in the community-at-large. Glory is not always a big event; it can be in smaller events as well. We see God's glory all around us, in the people we meet, in doing things for others, in those opportunities with which God presents us every day. There are times we do not recognize

opportunities until they are past. We, like Peter, James, and John, want to see; but we do not always listen or hear to be able to understand.

How do we remedy this? By strengthening our daily disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, spending time with God and reaching out to others on a regular basis. Many of us already do these things. Others are still searching. Part of our reaching out may be to encourage those who hunger for God to join in faith journeys of their own and to accept the invitation of those reaching out to them. In these ways, God clears the clouds of doubt, sorrow, hunger, thirst, and fear, and clothes us in hope, help, love, friendship and enables us to move forward out of our own comfort zones to empower others. May we each respond to the opportunities God gives us to witness of God's never-ending love, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.