

“Glimpses that matter”

February 3, 2008

Text: Matthew 17:1-9, 2 Peter 1:16-21

I.

It had been a tough few weeks for Jesus and his disciples. These were the days before his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on what we celebrate as **Palm Sunday**.

Clearly, Jesus had been working some things through in his spirit ... about who he was and what it was all about. Six days back, almost out of the blue, it seemed, he asked his disciples,

Who do people say that I am?

Imagine, you're one of Jesus' disciples, you've been following him for over a year, now, and suddenly: ***Who do people say that I am?***

Well, for sure, there'd been talk. Who was he? Was he John the Baptist, Elijah, or perhaps Jeremiah or some other prophet? Who was he? The disciples, of course, couldn't know for sure; but every day they were more convinced: *he was the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*

And then, Jesus started talking to them about his suffering and death at the hands of the religious elites. And when they protested and became upset, he told them ...

If you want to be my disciples, you have to deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow me.

Wow! It was all almost too much. They were all on emotional overload. What did it all mean?

And now, in our reading this morning, apparently to make a point, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain—much like MOSES in Exodus (when he received the Ten Commandments)—he takes them up the mountain where they experience a glimpse of his glory ... a glimpse of the truth of it all.

And what a glimpse!

II.

Before their eyes, he's transfigured. His face is shining like the sun; and his clothes are a dazzling white. And then, Moses and Elijah appear ... and then a loud voice:

This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

The same words that were spoken after his Baptism. And then these final words from above: *Listen to him!*

And just as it's all beginning to settle into their mindset, they look up and—whoosh ... it's all over.

But the glimpse lived on. Although they couldn't fully explain it, still, they couldn't deny it either. Glimpses can really grab us, can't they? And the final words kept ringing in their ears: *Listen to him!*

1. Listen to him in his tough talk about self-denial and taking up our cross and following him.
2. Listen to him in his difficult words on *suffering love* and forgiveness.
3. Listen to him in the straight talk on *loving our enemies* and *turning the other cheek*.

In a sermon on the Transfiguration, a Methodist preacher noted: *Don't ever underestimate the impact of a glimpse on a person who's trying to see the whole picture, to get his or her arms around what it means to follow Jesus.*

Sometimes we move forward by glimpses, don't we? Glimpses can shine a powerful light in our spirit—a light that is not easily extinguished.

III.

Think about it! We've all known glimpses, haven't we? Glimpses of truth, perhaps. Glimpses of pure joy and gripping enlightenment.

Sometimes, it's through music or a work of art, like a painting or a sculpture. We experience it and it takes us to an exalted place. Or sometimes it's in a resplendent sunset ... or a breathtaking view from a hilltop.

Sometimes, it happens in a speech or a sermon, even. We're listening and somehow the language that's being used, the metaphor, the vision that's being painted lifts our spirit and fills our mind with a rush of new insight and wisdom.

In the afterglow, we're sort of stunned ... or speechless. We know something has happened but we can't totally bring it to speech. We have to live with it for a while ... and work with it ... and give it a chance to coalesce in our mind and spirit.

When we catch a glimpse, it can make all the difference. **Glimpses that matter.**

Perhaps some of you have had life-threatening experiences, or know people that have. All the time, I hear stories of glimpses that people have experienced.

Often, it's some glimpse of the future with our most cherished loved ones. Usually, it includes some sort of vivid presence, like a vision that is so very real. These *glimpses that matter* give us insight into deeper realities that we can't explain. But we don't have to. We only know that they are real ... and that's all that matters.

In their glimpse of Jesus on the mountain, all the disciples knew was that their lives could never be the same.

And of course, for Moses, the receiver of the Law, to be there, along with Elijah, the father of the prophets, it was only further confirmation, to the disciples and to the early church, that both the Law and the prophets were fulfilled and magnified in Jesus.

Wow! What a glimpse! What a vision!

IV.

Our reading from 2 Peter is only further witness that certain glimpses of truth and insight are real. Moreover, 2 Peter takes it a step further: not only can these glimpses be real, they can be prompted by the Holy Spirit.

The truth is, friends, we never fully know how God is trying to communicate to us. We never fully know—nor should we—the ways of the Holy Spirit in the world. To some extent—and perhaps to a great extent—it's a mystery.

We catch a glimpse ... we experience a vision ... we feel a powerful presence. And whatever it is, it grabs us.

In part, this is what happened with the Peter, James and John on the mountain with Jesus. And it's further attested to in 2 Peter and became part of the witness of the apostolic tradition in the early church.

The early church knew this to be God's truth to the point where 2 Peter can say:

*You will do well to be attentive to this as to a **lamp shining in a dark place*** Clearly, a lamp shining in a dark place cannot be ignored. From every vantage point it can be seen. We know it is there. We know it is real.

V.

So where does this leave us, friends? Where it leaves us ... and where it takes us is to the admission and recognition that *glimpses that matter* come—through the sheer mystery of

life and through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

And it's up to us to pay attention ... with faithful hearts and faithful eyes and ears. Stuff happens. Mystery happens. The Holy Spirit happens.

And along the way, truth comes and our hopes and yearnings are lifted up. Lifted because ***glimpses that matter*** are reassuring ... of the essential goodness of life and of the saving *grace* of the God of infinite compassion and love.

Friends, if we're awake ... if we're seriously paying attention in our lives, ***glimpses*** come that make all the difference.

They make loving connections ... joyful connections ... of who we are and who we can become as children of God.

*And suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them and out of the cloud a voice sounded out: **This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!***

And later, once again, on a mountain in Galilee, as the experience of Easter began to build up in their hearts, Jesus came to them in spirit and said:

All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... share the GOOD NEWS, welcoming everybody in. Teach them ... love them ... for, lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Glimpses that matter!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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