

March 3, 2019

*Luke 9:28-36: **“The Cross Then the Glory!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever had a day that was so wonderful that you wanted it to last forever? I am sure you probably have. Our Gospel lesson today is about one of those days. We are told that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him up onto a mountain to pray. As Jesus was praying, something wonderful happened. The Bible tells us that “the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure [his exodus], which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

At first, the three apostles were heavy with sleep. When they became fully awake, they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men who stood with him. In the same way, we become sleepy in this life when it comes to the everyday Jesus who deals with us in this everyday world. We long to be fully awake with the heavenly glory of our Savior that removes the mundane of this down here with a dazzling up there. It is no wonder then that as the men were parting from Jesus, Peter tried to hold onto the moment and said to him, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He did not know what he was saying. Heaven cannot remain here combined with this messed up, sinful world. The mountain top experience was only a foretaste of what was to come after the cross. And so, there would come the moment when they would have to descend from the mountain.

Luke writes: “As he [Peter] was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!’” You see, in the midst of this wonderful, heavenly glory, the discussion was about the departure [the exodus] of Jesus. Now a cloud comes and overshadows them so that they are afraid as they enter the cloud. The glory is covered and they now feel the weight of the cross, the exodus that Jesus must face before the eternal glory that is associated with his resurrection from the dead. It is no coincidence that before the Transfiguration account, Jesus is teaching his disciples saying: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

It really is all about **The Cross then the Glory**. The glimpse of the glory of Jesus shows who Jesus is and what will one day come. At the time of our text, there was much to accomplish in Jerusalem. Down from the mountain they go, and the next happening recorded for us in Luke is a crowd of people and a demon possessed boy. Back to the grind of the cross, so to speak. It is a very hard lesson, and one that we really don't want to face in all of its detail. God sends happy days in our lives - days that we may never want to end because it feels as if the weight of everything has been removed - but these are short lived as long as we are down here. The life we live down here is cross life, and the glory that we share with Jesus is hidden. The glory is yet to be. One Lutheran theologian puts it in a way that we may not want to hear:

... the past few decades have witnessed a veritable explosion in the production of books that promise a vibrant, joy-filled and exciting adventure in Christian living ... Wouldn't it be heavenly to rise above the sin, afflictions, and trials of life or have them removed altogether by God's almighty power? ... The New Testament paints a quite different picture of what we

should expect from life in Christ in this present fallen world ... We must remember that Christian life is lived totally in the cross of Christ.

Indeed! The resurrection is yet to come. It is **The Cross then the Glory**. What that means is that while we long for the relief of heaven, we are still stuck down here. The Christian longs to be done with sin and death. The Christian longs for this unbelieving world to be over with its incessant attacks. The Christian longs to be no longer accused by the devil and his demons into sad and anxiety ridden thoughts. For now, we are bid to struggle and overcome the sinful flesh. We are bid to a life of self-denial and the plucking out of the eye, the loss of a hand, so that we will not be thrown into hell. For now, we must endure the violence of those who despise who we are and what we believe. For now, we must live in a world full of fallen angels who have designed our destruction.

All of this makes us rather sleepy in this life because we find that our Jesus, who comes to us in the means of grace, appears to be a very ordinary and ineffective Savior. Of course, that isn't true, but it sure feels that way when you are not on the mountain top. We long to be fully awake with the heavenly glory of our Savior who can whisk us away from all this pain and agony to the place where all earthly cares fade away. But, he doesn't do that ... immediately. He is still working to save his chosen people. He even uses us for that noble endeavor. And he bids us then to pick up our cross and follow him to our own suffering and death. Still, we are bid to see the bigger picture and press on regardless. We may not be able to eat the meal, but we are allowed to smell it. We smell it in our text.

Jesus is transfigured on a mountain. In the Bible, mountains are where we meet God. It makes sense. There is that which is below and there is that which is up above. In between there is a great expanse that separates the two. And yet, rising into the expanse there is a mountain that somehow bridges the gap and becomes a focal point of meeting. He who is above all things wishes to communicate something to us as we limp along in the down here as we daily carry our cross. Lest we forget, it is Jesus on the mountain who is transfigured. Here is the Son of God in changed human flesh. The record of this mountain top experience is given to us for our own mountaintop experience. It is here that we are given a taste of what is to come after the daily bearing of the cross. John writes (1 John 3:1-3):

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The heart of the Transfiguration of Jesus is that the glory that we see on the mountain is a glory that he gives to us through all that he accomplishes in Jerusalem. The discussion between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, regarding his departure [his exodus] is about our own departure [our exodus] from sin and death, this unbelieving world and its incessant attacks, and relief from the sad and anxiety ridden thoughts that the fallen angels would have us dwell on forever. The cross crucifies it all and promises a transformation that will rub out of our minds whatever pain and agony there is in this life. What we see on the mountain

and in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is ours forever. In other words, while we must continue to push through down here, we look forward to that which is to come. In fact, that which is to come is the gospel motivation that gives us all that we need to struggle and overcome what's in our way. All of this is to be exceedingly reassuring. All of what this fallen world has brought - sin, getting old, death, judgment - is relieved as we see Jesus transformed. After all, it isn't just Jesus that we see on the mountain, we also see Moses and Elijah. They are there because of what Jesus would accomplish in Jerusalem. This is also ours.

The truths that we see on the mountain cannot help but to be very exciting to us. In a sense, we have a mountaintop experience whenever we consider and believe these things. We well up with anticipation and want it all now. We forget that it is **The Cross then the Glory**. Today, we are reminded that for now the glory is a hidden glory that is only seen by faith. It will happen just as Christ rose from the dead. But, for now, it will have to be enough for us that our transfiguration is happening in a hidden and inward way by faith. Paul speaks about this when he says in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed [transfigured] by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

God is in the transforming business. Transfiguration is the transformation seen as a caterpillar emerges as a butterfly. The pupa stage begins when hormones are secreted by the insect's brain compelling it to attach itself to a leaf or twig and to shed its outer skin layer revealing hard skin, or its chrysalis, underneath. The word "chrysalis" comes from the Greek term (*chrysos*) meaning "gold" referring to its color. It can take weeks, months and even years for the butterfly to emerge. God provides everything for the transformation.

We are like a caterpillar. A believer's transfiguration begins in the mind, as the Word of God and his Spirit works in us. No wonder the voice from the cloud said to Peter, James, and John, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" The cross of Christ is working mightily in us, and what cannot be seen is, in fact, a glory to be revealed as we currently find ourselves in the chrysalis - dying to self, shedding our will and submitting to God's will. Though process-time varies, you can be assured your chrysalis is a work of gold protected by your Creator and "transformed from one degree of glory to another, and this from the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18)!"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott