

## **The Church of the Good Shepherd**

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The Last Sunday after Epiphany – February 11, 2018

Mark 9:2-9

I have always known that I wanted a child. After two years of marriage, Jonathan and I decided we were ready. It took some time and a little bit of science, but at last we were overjoyed to have our beautiful baby girl. Like most newborn babies, Emma didn't give us much rest. Feedings every two hours and colic didn't leave much time for sleeping, housekeeping... or bathing, for that matter. I hadn't seen this much of the late-night hours between midnight and 5am since I was in college. Now, I know that most folks would dismiss the story I am about to tell you as being merely the result of serious sleep-deprivation, but I know better.

One late sleepless night something surprising and awe-some happened. It must have been around 3 or 4 in the morning and I was holding two-week old Emma while sitting in the darkened living room, lit only faintly by a low light in the kitchen. I was gazing at her, slightly mesmerized by her beauty and perfection and beginning to sense the enormity and fierceness of my love for this tiny creature, when... I swear this is true... she started to glow. She was looking into my eyes and there, in my arms, a warm light surrounded my little Emma and she radiated an otherworldly and yet certain peace and knowing.

There, before me, she was transfigured – she was lit with God's glory and something extraordinary was revealed about her nature. This must have lasted only a moment before it faded and she returned to her normal baby self, but that was long enough to leave me forever changed by the experience. It was then that I understood what it meant to be made in the image of God. That night, for only a moment, she bore this image and shined warmly and brightly with God's glory. And a little part of myself was given new life, as the seeds of hope were planted in my soul.

I treasured this beautiful and inexplicable experience in my heart, keeping it to myself lest people think I was crazy. But later, to my surprise, Jonathan shared with me that he had experienced a similar encounter with her. We were, and remain, convinced that what we experienced was real, even if it sounds like we were just hallucinating sleep-deprived new parents. I suspect we are not the only ones to experience something remarkable like this when in the presence of a newborn. It is as if, only recently born into the world, they are still wet and dripping with God. And in moments such as these, we are given a glimpse of glory.

Today is the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany. Throughout the past five weeks, we have read Gospel accounts of the revelation of Jesus' true nature. From Jesus' baptism and God's pronouncement that he is God's son, the Beloved, to his calling of his disciples, his teaching and revealing the divine authority given him, his healing of the crowds of the sick and casting out of demons, and now to today's account of his transfiguration, our Sunday lessons have revealed that this Nazarene is, indeed, more than a merely a carpenter's son... That God is working in and through Jesus in a new and powerful way.

Our gospel lesson today is the story of the transfiguration of Jesus, as found in the Gospel of Mark. Immediately before today's lesson, Peter boldly confesses Jesus as Messiah. This is followed by Jesus giving the disciples the shocking news that he is a quite different Messiah than they were expecting – one that will be rejected by the religious authorities and put to death, and then after three days, will rise again. More than that, Jesus goes on to tell the disciples that they,

too, must take up their crosses and follow him, saying, “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” (16:24-25)

I can only imagine that it must have been shocking to be told that the Messiah that had been foretold in holy scripture would look little like King David, and more like the suffering servant prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. It must have been difficult to accept that this Messiah would not be the strong political and military leader they had waited their whole lives for and who would save them from Roman oppression, but instead is a Messiah who will be rejected, scorned and killed, and who exhorts them to deny themselves, lose their lives for his sake, and to take up their crosses and follow him. The disciples must have wrestled for some time with this dissonance and it is this struggle with Jesus’ revelation of his Messiahship that sets the stage for our lesson today.

It is now six days later and Jesus pulls away from the crowds to pray. This time he does not go alone. Jesus takes his closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him up the high mountain, and in their presence something truly surprising and awe-some happens. Appearing in angelic glory, Jesus was transfigured before them. His countenance shined brightly and his clothing became dazzling white. ***Before the disciples’ eyes, the holiness of Jesus shined through his humanness; his appearance radiant with God’s glory.***

This was still the Jesus of Nazareth they knew, the man they’ve traveled with on all the back roads of Galilee, the one who they’ve seen as hungry and tired as the rest of them. But this was also the Messiah, the Christ, in all his glory. And he is now joined by Moses and Elijah, also in great splendor, as they discussed what was about to come.

The disciples are then overshadowed by a cloud and, out of this cloud, a voice from heaven speaks directly to them, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” After this the cloud disappears and Jesus is again alone and returned to his usual self. And while Mark tells us that the disciples keep silence about what happened on that mountain, you know they were forever changed. The glory of Jesus shines through this story, illuminating and highlighting his divine nature. Peter, John, and James have been given a precious glimpse of this glory. The transfiguration of Jesus offers a foretaste of what is possible, not only for Jesus, but for all humanity, and plants new seeds of hope within all who encounter it.

In our first lesson this morning, St. Paul writes about the power of hope that comes from an encounter with God’s glory as reflected in Christ. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul calls his readers from lives of spiritual blindness to a new life found in Christ. He promises that through living faithful lives in Christ, we may encounter God’s glory in its fullness, and that we, too, may reflect the glory of God that shined in the face of Jesus.

You see, as children of God, we are made for the glory of God. To be a human being is to be a glory-bearing, glory reflecting, glory-bound creature. We have been created to bear this glory in a conflicted and hurting world. We are called to enter into places that seem destitute of hope and shine Christ’s light. We are to keep our attention on the risen Lord and bear his likeness so that all may know that they have indeed been made for the glory of God. We are also called to find God’s splendor reflected throughout creation. We are to seek and witness to the glory we find reflected in each other and in the world around us. We are to look into each other’s faces to find where God’s glory is shining...even when it may be dim and hard to recognize.

But in order to encounter God’s glory reflected in the faces and lives of each other, we have to encounter people – we have to engage in the world – and we have to be open for the unexpected. We must leave our safe cocoon and engage in the world with all its messiness, all its

pain and confusion, and all its glorious beauty. Because that is where Christ is – that is where God is at work – that is where the risen Lord will be busy healing and forming new disciples to share the good news. And it is there that we may see most clearly the Spirit of the Lord at work transfiguring lives by softening hardened hearts and opening blind eyes to glory of the kingdom of God in their midst.

And once you have been given this glimpse of glory you cannot but reflect it for others. Ordinary people once having encountered the glorious and surprising splendor of God have no choice but to be transfigured themselves and to reflect that glory. And by its brightness, we see are able to see it in the lives of others.

Amen.