

“To be continued.” The TV season finale gets to a dramatic turning point and then on the screen: *“To be continued.”* In our Old Testament lesson for today, the great prophet Elijah is about to be taken up into heaven in the sight of Elisha, his successor. Seems like a *“to be continued”* kind of deal, as the flaming chariot carries Elijah away, up into the sky.

Now, flash forward to a different scene, today’s Gospel lesson. Elijah *reappears*, a long-anticipated sign of the Messiah’s appearance, and Moses shows up; who, when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments in hand, his face had shone *so brightly* that he had to put a veil over it. The story of God’s glory continues there on *another* mountain with Jesus, his awestruck disciples in the front row seats. Each year on this Transfiguration Sunday, we reflect on this image of God’s glory, with Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent close on the horizon.

We get some help in understanding this strange story when we look at where it is placed in the Gospel of Mark. It comes right after Jesus’ first prediction of his suffering and death, and Jesus *will* be betrayed, tortured, mocked, and killed. The extraordinary glimpse of glory uncovers Jesus’ true identity to the disciples who had gone with Jesus up that mountain. Only a few days before, those same disciples had been horrified when Jesus told them he was going to Jerusalem, where he would suffer a fate that was anything but glorious by any human standard.

In the gospel of Mark, only Jesus hears the divine voice of blessing at his Baptism; but *now* the disciples hear it too, a well-timed announcement that can strengthen them when they come down the mountain, as they will be dealing with the difficult days ahead, days of suffering, doubt, and betrayal. A simple message comes from the cloud: *“This is my beloved Son, listen to him.”* Now, *we* hear that message too. This mountaintop glimpse of God’s glory can encourage us as well, when our world engulfs us with brokenness.

Today, on the hinge between Epiphany and Lent, our glimpse of glory is meant to sustain *us* in our calling, to help us faithfully carry out cross-bearing service down on the plain. The call to “listen to Jesus” helps us share Christ’s love in a decidedly un-glorious world of suffering, anxiety, despair, brokenness, emptiness--where the powers of evil and death too often *claim* to have the final word.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. shared a glimpse of God’s glory in his last speech that he gave shortly before he was assassinated in Memphis. He spoke movingly of “having been to the mountain.” He seemed to know that his life would end as it did, violently and very soon. The glory of God’s vision for justice and peace in this country sustained Dr. King and gave him the serenity and courage to keep on going. He said, echoing the voice of Moses as the Israelites were at the brink of finally entering the Promised Land, *“I’ve seen it, I may not get there with you; but I’ve been to the mountain.”* Dr. King had listened to Jesus, and he saw the paradox of the glory of God in the face of a cross-bound Jesus. And it helped to sustain him down on the difficult and dangerous plains of prophetic ministry.

Up there on Transfiguration Mountain, Peter didn't know what to say, but being Peter, he didn't let *that* stop him. It is human nature to want to hold onto glorious moments--to camp out there, in another place, in another time. But that means trying to have Resurrection without the Cross, wanting to go directly from Hosanna to Alleluia, with no Good Friday in between. With those first disciples, we also face temptations to "*hold onto the glory*" at the expense of the cross. We tend to look for other authorities, whose message is a little easier to hear.

It's like the man who is holding onto a branch, dangling out over a deep ravine, hanging on for dear life. He hollers out, "Is anybody up there?" And receives the calm answer, "Don't worry, I'm here." So the desperate man pleads, "What should I do?" The voice answers, "Let go, trust me. I will take your hand, but you have to let go." There is a long pause, and then "*Is anybody ELSE up there?*"

Jesus stays faithful on his way to his cross, in spite of powerful temptations to go another way. Glorious mountaintop experiences can tempt us to lose sight of the *here and now* mission *down on the plain*. Jesus Christ heads back down the mountain, down to where the needs for healing and hope cry out. He sets his face toward Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die. The glory on the mountain does not divert Jesus from the un-glorious path toward Calvary and the cross; it helps to equip him to withstand it.

Up on that mountain, Peter, James, and John had been offered a glimpse *past* the veil of suffering and death that Jesus had predicted a few days before; a view beyond their doubts, beyond their unfaithfulness--a view that will only make sense, if at all, after the Resurrection. When you've had a preview of how things turn out in the end, it *affects* how you will be able to perceive the present. It's hope.

Transfiguration includes the call to listen to Jesus, and to see Jesus. If we see the world through the eyes of Christ's love, we will see possibilities beyond what we can envision on our own. We are invited to envision everything and everyone as a window into the glory of God, however hidden that glory may be. We need God's help to see the extraordinary brilliance of God's glory within the ordinary stuff of our lives.

The eye won't see what it doesn't know to look for. Every child playing "*Where's Waldo*" knows you can't find Waldo unless you know who to look for. You will not see the hidden grandeur of God if your mind is closed and your heart is hardened against it. The *eye* is just an instrument, the *vision* is the gift. The disciples saw the vision on the mountain; then they saw only Jesus. Jesus Christ is what God has to "show and tell" us. Listen to him, and watch for his working.

We get a brief glimpse into the underlying glory of God at work through the created stuff, so often hidden in simple ordinariness. The ordinariness of day after day, parents patiently feeding and cleaning up after their children, or children lovingly feeding and cleaning up after an aged parent, listening to them wander on for the fiftieth time today about the same old story, their faded glory.

We will, as we walk this path, learn to see with our hearts more of the hidden grandeur of God, to hear with our hoping where we might otherwise encounter bare silence. The veiled glory of God goes down that mountain, heading off to Jerusalem, to the cross, becoming one with us in facing the pain of our fear, our sadness, our alienation from God.

As the scene fades and the voice from the clouds is silent, and Jesus and the disciples head down the mountain, the story of Jesus is also “*to be continued . . .*” The road leads to Jerusalem, to service and self-sacrifice, to the cross. “*To be continued . . .*” in the shining Easter morning face of the risen Christ, still alive now and present in our life together. And the spotlight shifts to *us*, because we too have heard the voice, we have seen and share the glory of God in the face of Jesus-- in study and service, in caring and praying, in God’s promises connected to the meal that we will share. God’s work is “*to be continued . . .*” among us and through us too.

Please do not think that what we do here today is just ordinary. Every hymn we sing, every confession we make, the hope we take from the scripture, the prayers we offer, the meal we share, it’s all a foretaste of the feast to come. Through it all, God is cracking a door to let us see the rest of the story, to see how it will all turn out one fine and final day, the great and glorious mystery. So, Lord, help us to see your glory at work in our world and in our lives. Help us to listen to Jesus, to trust his word and share his life.