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11 o'clock am

Community Church of Issaquah  
Issaquah, Washington

**"Glory"**  
Luke 9:28-36

The light was blinding, spilling across the mountainside, making it impossible to see anything. Pure, white light. Dense with glory and yet buoyant with joy. It was like nothing Simon Peter had experienced before.

And Peter had experienced a lot these past few months. It had all started that day when the preacher from Nazareth everyone had been talking about had come to his house. Peter's mother-in-law had been sick. It was a fever and it was refusing to break. His wife had been getting so worried. And then this preacher had come and stood over her and rebuked fever—and it was gone...just like that.

And after that there was that day down at the lake when Jesus had told Peter to throw his nets in on the other side of the boat—during the daytime no less. And Peter had watched as the boats began to creak and crack under the weight of the biggest catch of fish he or any of the others had ever seen.

Then these last few months of following this man, Jesus, seeing him heal the blind and proclaim release to the captives, all of the markers of the one who it was said would be anointed by God. I mean, Peter had seen Jesus raise the synagogue leader's daughter from the dead! Peter had heard of about such things happening in the Scriptures, but these things were happening in Galilee, at the lake where he fished every day, in his *own home*.

So last week when Jesus had asked him and the other disciples, "Who do you say that I am," Peter gave the only answer that explained what he had seen: "Jesus, you are the Messiah of God."

This morning when Jesus had motioned to John, James and him to walk up the mountain with him to pray, of course he followed. But nothing he had seen these past few months prepared him for this. This light. This joy. This *glory*. It was almost more than he could take in, it was so overpowering.

And wait, was that Moses and Elijah in the light with Jesus? Was that *the* Moses? The one who had led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt? Who had received the Law on the mountain from God? Who stood with the Israelites on the banks of the Jordan, looking across into the Promised Land? And was that *Elijah*? The *prophet* Elijah? Who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind? The prophet who was said to come back only when the Messiah would appear? It looking like the Law and the Prophets—the spiritual giants of old—had shown up to glorify and honor this man who Peter had walked beside down dusty roads.

*This moment up here on the mountain has got to be what this whole thing is about. This must be the moment all of the disciples have been waiting for. What could be more than this? Pure, unadulterated glory. Jesus revealed in all of his splendor with God speaking from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!"*

This is it. God's kingdom has come to earth.

Now I'm going to step away from Peter's experience for a second. See, Peter is as usual, getting things partially right and partially wrong. Up on that mountain God's kingdom has come to earth. But that moment on the mountain, the Transfiguration, it's not *the* moment. Jesus shines in glory, but we still have fifteen more

chapters in the Gospel of Luke. The transfiguration is not the endgame.

This is where Peter doesn't quite get what Jesus is up to. If you think back to our passage, Peter wants to set up dwellings and call it quits here in chapter nine. Now "dwellings" is not a great translation from the Greek. More accurate is "tents" or "tabernacles" or "booths." See what Peter wants to do is celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles—what in Hebrew is called Sukkot. Sukkot is a week in autumn where Jews build little sukkahs, booths or tents, and live in them for a week to remember God's provision during the years wandering in the wilderness living in tents. The Jewish people I know today still build sukkahs in the fall and hang out in them for a week sharing food and remembering the Exodus and the 40 years of wandering.

Peter wants to celebrate Sukkot because he recognizes that Jesus is one who is delivering the Jews just like the Lord did in the Exodus from Egypt. Peter wants to settle down and keep the party going. It's not an unusual response. It's a perennial temptation for us to want to camp out on our mountaintop experiences with God. We want to take our spiritual high points—the week at summer camp or the surprising call to a new ministry or an experience of God's presence in prayer—and set up shop there. We want to bask in God's glory because God's glory is so healing to us. Those glory-filled moments are restorative. All of us are tempted to suggest what Peter did: that the mountaintop moments are *the* moments. The moments we should try to never leave.

But you know, this moment on the mountaintop is not meant to last forever. It's like one of those winter days we get—like yesterday—that are absolutely perfect. The sun shines radiantly. The mountains are out. Everybody is happy. But what usually follows a perfect winter day in the NW? Weeks and weeks of rain [a la today]. A sunny winter day is just a glimpse of a summer that's still pretty far away. It is a foretaste of

what we'll get in five months. But you know what, we need the next five months. The rain is necessary. And yet, those rare sunny winter days are what give us the strength and vitamin D to remember summer *exists*. Summer will come. We can survive.

The transfiguration is Peter's and our glimpse of the Jesus' eternal glory. It is the strengthening, the confirmation that is needed for the costly discipleship that is coming. Because Jesus is about to turn his face to Jerusalem, and *in Jerusalem is the true moment of revelation. In Jerusalem is the cross. And in Jerusalem is the resurrection.*

Now this is where it becomes clear that Peter is really being pretty thick. Because Peter wants to settle down and celebrate Sukkot, but Jesus has just told the disciples *a mere six verses* before that as the Son of God he "must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised," and none of that has happened yet.

Again, little surprise that this is Peter's reaction. Who in all of human history had the ears to hear Jesus words that the cross is Jesus' path and that the cross is to be our path to if we choose to follow him.

If I am honest, these words scare me. I want like Peter to ignore them. I want to pretend that Jesus didn't say them. I want to hope that these mountaintops are the places that God wants to leave me. That my path will be easier than what Jesus has said it will be.

I want to argue, Peter didn't know he signed up for this. He just followed a traveling preacher from Nazareth who had life and abundance flowing out of him. I want to say, we too didn't know what we were doing when we started following Jesus.

But then I think: This is the nature of discipleship. This is the nature of whole-hearted commitment. A few months ago, I got to witness a few people being baptized, and all I could think was, “Oh my gosh, you have no idea what you’re getting into.” But you know what. None of us have any idea of what we’re doing when we begin our path with Jesus. It’s like getting married. Could you ever know on your wedding day what it will mean to commit to the person standing at your side for a lifetime? How could committing to follow Jesus be any less unknowable? It is a scary thing to be told, this path you have chosen is richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, till death do you part.

Now, I do want to say something here, and it’s really important. Some Christians think that when Jesus says, “If you want to follow me, you must take up your cross” that means that we have to *choose* suffering. That in some way pain and death are Christian things to do, and that somehow we need to seek those things out.

I say to that: no way. First of all, we worship the Lord of life in whom there is no darkness at all. Death is and will always be the enemy. Death is the antithesis of Christianity.

And so second, suffering and death are never, ever considered good. There’s nothing salvific or beautiful about suffering in and of itself.

BUT, and this is an important but, sometimes, not always, but sometimes, if we take the Gospel story at its word, whole-hearted obedience to God does lead through rejection, and does lead through suffering, and does lead through death. Sometimes, our obedience to God means that our faces have to turn to Jerusalem. Sometimes, our obedience to God means that we will not be able to avoid crosses that are thrust upon us by a world that in the mysterious way of sin rejects life and love. I think this is why we honor and respect men and women like Martin Luther King Jr. and Oscar Romero and Mother Teresa so

much. It’s not that they sought out suffering and death. It’s that their obedience to God was so great that if the path with Jesus went through isolation or pain or even death they still walked the path.

That we will have crosses to bear is Jesus’ clear word to us. That the cross follows the transfiguration is the story of Scripture. And yet I have to say as I say before that the story still scares me. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is so weak. Which is why I am so grateful for the witness of Peter. Because Peter does turn his face to Jerusalem with Jesus. And Peter is with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. And then Peter encounters his own time of trial. Three times in the courtyard as Jesus is enduring his passion, people tell Peter that he has followed the preacher from Galilee. And feeling his life threatened, three times Peter denies the preacher who healed his mother-in-law and broke his nets with fish and raised the dead to new life.

And yet this is Peter. Who Jesus builds his church upon. We are the church. We are built upon Peter. Who got it and didn’t get it. Who saw that Jesus was the Messiah before anyone else, and then who couldn’t walk the path to the cross. See, Jesus does what we could never do. He dies and then he defeats death—and he doesn’t leave anyone behind. This is glory. That Jesus saves us while we are still sinners. That Jesus walks the path that we fear to trod, that we refuse to trod and then in the most amazing good news of all time, Jesus then still calls us friends.

See the transfiguration was glorious. But this, this salvation, this offering of friendship even when discipleship has fallen apart, this is unsurpassable glory, unimaginable glory. Glory that Peter wanting to set up camp on the mountaintop could have never imagined. Glory as of the only begotten of the Father. Glory. Glory to God now and forever and on earth peace among those on whom his favor rests. Amen.