

## The Last Sunday after the Epiphany - The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church

Farmington, New Mexico

**Exodus 24:12,15-18** The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”

**15** When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, **16** and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. **17** To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. **18** Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

### “Faith’s Mountain View of Glory”

Mountain peaks have an unmistakably awe-inspiring quality. How you feel about mountains depends on your perspective. When you are wearing shorts enjoying 56 degree temperatures and sunshine in February, those snowcapped mountain peaks in the distance are beautiful. If you have to traverse multiple mountain passes to get to an essential appointment, those same peaks can riddle you with anxiety. Last summer I was considering taking my then 9 year old on a hike up to a majestic peak. My imagination soared with panoramic views of lush forests and untamed wildlife. Then I read the description of the road getting to the trailhead and questioned my ability to even get to the start. Reading further about the snowfields making the trek nearly impassable to all but the most daring and experienced mountaineers was a deal breaker. I had to give up any thought of even attempting the hike.

In Exodus chapter 24 we get a view of a mountain. Moses climbs to the top of Mount Sinai to be with the LORD. God’s majesty radiates from the top. God’s glory envelops his servant. It’s a different view from below. Awe-inspiring majesty becomes fear-paralyzing holiness. Divine glory becomes otherworldly destructive power. But when we see these verses in the context of Jesus going up the Mount of Transfiguration, we see God drawing us closer. And not to destroy or annihilate us. But to share in his glory. When we see Mount Sinai and the mountains of Jesus, we get an invitation to bask in the radiating majesty of the LORD. It’s faith’s view of the mountain. And with confidence through faith in Jesus Christ, we have the most awe-inspiring sight of God’s glory.

I always wonder what Steven Spielberg or the best team of animators from Disney would do with some of these episodes from the Bible. The LORD extends this invitation to Moses: **“Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”** (Exodus 24:12) When Moses responded, then **“the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai.”** (Exodus 24:15,16) When that sinks it, it seems better that the CGI artists and Hollywood production studios just leave this account alone. Could anything really capture the astounding, but authentic glory of the LORD?

I might not trust any artist to put it on a screen, but glory - real and devastating glory - is something I could use in my life. We all could. Whether it's amazing images shared on Instagram or life-transforming stories shared in the pages of magazines, we all want something that can help us get life to the next level. Glory from God could help us reach our goals for ourselves. And maybe those goals aren't plastered on company letterhead or imprinted on a wall in prominent view from a business entrance. But it's easy to think of one thing I need from God. One life companion. A new level of respect from friends. A slightly better job. Getting off one medication. Just paying off one bill to keep the collection agencies away. Just enough money left after paying the bills to save up for something fun and interesting.

It's the attitude of Peter up on the mountain with Jesus. When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, when his clothes radiated more blindingly than any bleach could brighten, Peter gushed "**Lord, it is good for us to be here.**" (Matthew 17:4) That comment might qualify as understatement of the year. Peter even offered to make shelters for them all to camp out on the mountain to enable them to bask in that glory for a sustained season. I want that experience. I want to be part of that exclusive group that gets VIP access to Jesus' glory. That's the view we want.

But that's not the whole story of God's glory. It is just a glimpse into our human attempts to tame and harness the majesty of God for our own purposes. If you go for a walk and encounter a Rottweiler in your path, how do you react? Do you admire the strength and power of that animal? Do you freeze with fright as what he might do to you if he's in a bad mood? Do you dream of having him on a leash so you can control him? Or perspire with panic if he's running wild?

God's glory is kind of like a Rottweiler. Maybe a Pitbull. Probably not your Labradoodle. When Moses went up the mountain to meet with God, he went inside the cloud. He was enveloped by God's glory. But it was a different view from the ground. Exodus tells us: "**To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.**" (Exodus 24:17) Did that glory devour their beloved leader? Was God coming to get them next? That's the other side of God's glory. The side that can't be tamed and controlled. God's fiery majesty consumes anything impure and unholy. In centuries past, majesty used to strike fear. One false step in the presence of someone with true majesty might mean a beheading.

The terrifying view of God up on that mountain is comprehending how comprehensive his instructions and commands are. God demands not just self-improvement, but perfection. God forms a covenant not to help us reach our goals, but live in a relationship of complete trust and dependence with him. Trust him enough to make his work the controlling factor in my life and not just an add-on to my existence. Enjoy my relationship with God so much that money or friends, success or comfort takes back seat to serving and expressing that relationship with him every minute of every day. So, while it is enticing to imagine what God's glory could do for us, a better understanding of what his holiness could do to us

causes us to retreat. God's glory could be useful in my life. But the reality of his holiness pushes me back to a safer distance.

We need a different view of God's glory. We need something less threatening than the view of the Israelites at Sinai and something less naive than the view of Peter at the Transfiguration. Jesus gives us faith's view of God's glory. See, Jesus couldn't stay on that peak with Peter, James, and John conversing with Moses and Elijah. He had to come down. He had to face real danger and real rejection. Jesus had to face the disgrace of jealous religious leaders and the contempt of fickle crowds. Jesus came down from the mountain because he wasn't looking out for himself. Jesus wasn't dreaming about the many ways he could roll this mountain top experience into great publicity or induce more followers to awe his majesty. Jesus came down from the mountain with the confidence vote of the Father to face humiliation and death. Jesus gave up glory when he descended to earth from heaven. Jesus sunk to the deepest depths of being despised and tortured when he went up onto the cross at Calvary.

Scholars are analyzing and experts are evaluating the roots behind the astronomical rates of anxiety and depression in our world today. At a time when we have less to fear from war and epidemic disease than ever before in human history, why are we so miserable? One author describes our times as the "grey days of modernity." Stephen Pietsch, a Lutheran professor from Australia describes our current situation: "We are expected to realise our potential in a world of expanding possibilities that no human being can keep up with. We are saturated with information yet the very volume of it all prevents us from really acting on or responding to it. Consequently, people are frequently paralysed by boredom and purposelessness. In all sectors of life, definition and differentiation are blurred and greyed." (Pietsch, Stephen. *Of Good Comfort* (p. 232). ATF (Australia) Ltd. Kindle Edition.) In other words, we have too many options. Too many voices telling us how to be happy. We try different approaches. We attempt different methods. Today maybe it will be yoga. Tomorrow a new diet. Get a new haircut. Buy some new clothes. Get in your truck and drive off to where you know there won't be any cell phone reception. But none of those things bring us in contact with true and lasting glory.

In contrast, when we draw closer to Jesus in faith, every day is a mountain top experience. Not that we escape every variety of fear and frustration. But the holiness of God that causes us to retreat in fear is seen best in Jesus. The glory of God that called Moses up Mount Sinai required perfect conformity to every instruction and complete adherence to his commands. Jesus was the only one to live his life perfectly to hear: "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!**" (Matthew 17:5) Because Jesus lived his life humbly, yet perfectly in your place, you have God's glory. And not the glory that consumes and devours. But the glory that embraces sinners through the life and death of Jesus lived out in your place. By faith in Jesus, God's presence goes with you in every aspect of every day of your life. By faith, you can soak in the panoramic view of Christ's performance done for you. By faith, you can be bold to face the challenges you face every day. By faith you have the guarantee of future glory. Not a few days in a temporary shelter with Peter and Moses and Elijah. Not 40 days on Mount Sinai with Moses. You have God's true and ultimate glory in heaven for all eternity.

When God calls out “**Come up to me,**” he doesn’t do it from behind razor wire fencing and snarling Rottweilers. (Exodus 24:12) You can come forward and come into his presence to enjoy a deeper relationship with God through his Word of instruction and commandments. You don’t have to treat God like a pet on a leash. Peace with God through the glory of Jesus seen at the cross gives you that one thing. If that life companion never materializes, you still have God’s glory. If that better job or increased respect never happens, you have God’s majesty. If your finances never figure themselves out, you have the riches of God’s grace. If heartache and health concerns refuse to dislodge themselves from your life, you have Jesus.

Jesus shows us the irony of true glory comes through his ultimate humiliation. The humility of Jesus brings us into the majesty of God so we can gasp and shriek like a child who has been given a puppy for her birthday. The determination of Jesus to descend the mount of glory and go willingly into the hands of betrayers and schemers opens the generosity of God to us so we can hyperventilate like the little leaguer who gets to meet Mike Trout. The grace of Jesus transports us into the glory of God so we can stand in stunned silence a wife who has been given the keys to a new Lexus on her anniversary. The victory of Jesus accomplished by his cross and empty grave envelops us with the peace of God that gives us the satisfied, joyful heart of a grandmother who has all her children and grandchildren around her for her birthday.

You don’t have to make a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai to get enveloped by God’s cloud. You don’t have to travel back in time to Galilee to join the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration to see divine brilliance. You don’t need a trip to the mountains to get an amazing view. You have Jesus. With Jesus you have a view of glory for whatever you face in life. With Jesus, you have faith’s mountain view of glory. Amen.