

February 6, 2005  
Transfiguration, Last Sunday after the Epiphany  
Luke 14:25-33  
Pastor Ott

## God Shows His Glory

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed. It is interesting at times how the same exact thing can have different effects on us. If you are cooking on the stovetop and a grease fire breaks out, that fire isn't exactly something you are happy to see, is it? It is something that scares you, gets your heart pumping, gets the blood racing and puts you in action pretty quick with all of that adrenaline coursing through your veins.

At the same time, that fire that is in your furnace that is burning to heat the whole house is a source of great comfort. Now if that fire goes out, you are a little worried aren't you? Okay, maybe not so much today, but most of the time at this time of the year. The same exact thing, fire, can produce terror and it can bring comfort. It depends on your point of view. It depends on what it is doing.

Today we see in our text God's glory appearing to the Israelites like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. We see another mountain top where God works to reveal His glory through His voice on the Mount of Transfiguration. At times the effect produces terror. The Israelites and Peter, James and John, when they saw the glory of the Lord were terrified. But as you and I think about this and look back on this today, the same exact thing, the glory of the Lord, brings us great comfort. God reveals Himself to us so that we learn things about Him. So that we learn how desperately we need Him and what we cannot do on our own and that He is the only place where we are going to find comfort. And that is really the exact same purpose that took place on both those mountains. God shows His glory to reveal truths to His people.

This morning we are going to look at how He revealed His glory on Mount Sinai and also on the Mount of Transfiguration and see how He wants to reveal His glory still today.

In this account from the life of Moses, Moses had been up on that mountain, Mount Sinai, after they had come out of Egypt. They had camped there before they were going to go up to the Promised Land. He had went up on the mountain already earlier and heard from the Lord all of the teachings, the ceremonial law, the civil law, all those things. He had gone and shared them with the Israelites and they had a covenant ratification ceremony where the people had said, "Everything that you have said is good, we will do it. We will do what the Lord commands." And then Moses and the elders went up on the mountain, a little way up the mountain, and we are told they ate with God, face to face. God was there in something that looked like clear sapphire underneath His feet. But they ate with Him face to face and were not struck dead. And now, right after that, God says to Moses, "*Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the laws and commands*", all the ceremonial and civil laws, the Ten Commandments, the commands of the law, and the

commands of the teaching, that is literally what He says here. I will give it all to you and you can take it back to the people.

But did you notice what happened next? Moses goes farther up the mountain leaving those elders and the other people behind there where they had that wonderful meal that must have been so engrained in his memory. And he goes up the mountain and he has to go up a little ways, or however far he went, and he stayed there six days. Six days he sat there on a mountain. If I would not say a word in the next six minutes, how many of you would just get so fidgety you would have to do something. We can't sit still for hardly any time at all. Six days he sat on the mountain and waited until on the seventh day, God said come a little farther up the mountain. Think of the faith this took on Moses' part--the trust in God--the trust that God knew what he was doing. Think of how often you and I are so impatient and want things now--we want to make instant coffee in a microwave so that we can actually go back in time. But God teaches Moses patience to rely on Him and rely on His word. It is a wonderful lesson for us who at times are so impatient.

So that is what Moses did. The seventh day God says to come up the mountain farther, and spend forty days and forty nights on that mountain. Forty days—a number that often seems to signify in scripture a strengthening, spiritual testing, refining by fire. Jesus in the wilderness. Forty years in the wilderness for the Israelites after they disobeyed God. Moses was there those forty days. But think of it from the point of view of the Israelites. They see Moses go up there and to them, God's glory looks like a fire, a consuming fire, a fire that is burning and consuming things but things still remain there. Kind of along the lines of the burning bush is what comes to mind when Moses had first seen it. A consuming fire--something that would have terrified them. In fact, when they saw Moses come down and his face was radiant from being in the presence of God, they said don't have God ever talk to us. You go talk to Him. We can't stand to be in the presence of the Holy God. They are terrified by it all.

They should be. You and I should be terrified to be in the presence of the Holy God. God is holy and He demands that you and I be holy as He is holy. He doesn't demand that you and I try our best. He doesn't demand that you and I find someone that is more of a scoundrel than we are. He says compare ourselves to Him. That is what makes God giving this law to Moses so amazing. Because He gives it to us to show the Israelites and to show us that we can't rely on ourselves. That when we take and look at ourselves in the mirror of God's law and we see everything that He requires of us, everything He demands of us, we can't hide the imperfections. When we look at what God says, we need more than extreme makeover to make our appearance fitting before God. There is nothing that the hand of man can do to fix us up, to patch us up, to make us presentable to God. God's law makes that clear.

So why does God do that? Does He delight in seeing us humiliated at how far short we fall of perfection? Does He like to watch us squirm? No. He does it because He knows what we are by nature. He knows by nature that you and I are going to find excuses, we are going to find rationalizations on why our gossip is okay but their gossip is wrong. About how my words of anger are okay but their words are wrong. How my words of hurt should have hurt because they had it coming, but your words that hurt me are

terrible in front of God. God knows what we are like and how we will excuse and rationalize everything. So He lays it down so that it can be seen and read. There is a certain absolute right or wrong before God. And if you fall on the wrong side of the equation even once God says, you are not holy and you cannot approach me on the basis of your own actions.

The glory that shines on Mount Sinai is a glory that reveals our God has extremely high demands and high standards. It shows us that you and I could never approach that glory. We are going to be unfit. We are going to be unable to bring it to completion. We are going to be separated from God if we rely on ourselves.

So the Lord points us to another mountain where Moses, the same man who was on that mountain in the glory of the Lord, is on another mountain. And another time God's glory is revealed. This time through a majestic cloud. This time through words. But Moses and Elijah come and we are told they talked with Jesus. And in one of the other Gospels besides Matthew, we are told that they talked about His impending suffering and death in Jerusalem. Because when Jesus came down off that mountain, He set his face toward Jerusalem and He never turned from it. He continued his journey and went to Jerusalem and carried to Jerusalem our sins, our imperfections. What you and I could never make over by our own efforts, Jesus left the mountain of glory and carried that to Jerusalem and washed away every last one of our sins. Now, even though you and I, when we look at God's law and see the imperfections of our thoughts, our words and our actions, when God looks at us, we are covered with Jesus' perfection. His perfect life covers us. God doesn't see our sins. Through faith in Jesus, He sees perfection. He sees holiness. That is God's gift to us through faith in Jesus.

But it wasn't easy for Jesus. Even there on the mountain of glory, He had the temptation that came from Peter. Peter who said, this is an incredible place. There is Moses and Elijah, the heroes of faith. There is someone there talking to Jesus in His full, divine glory. You can see that Matthew is almost searching for words. *"His face shown like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."* Human words can't describe the divine glory that Jesus has possessed from all eternity. They are searching, and they don't do it justice. He sees it's incredible. That is when he says, *"I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* And we won't ever come down from here. People can come up and sit at your feet and learn from you and we will establish your kingdom on earth right here and right now--this incredible kingdom of glory with everything that I am seeing. But Jesus has to say no. He has to tap him on the shoulder and say you are fearful of the voice of God, but we have got work to do. I have to go down. Jesus says it is not all about me. The Father says it is not all about me. Jesus says it is all about the Father and His will be done. The Father says, *"This is my son, whom I love... Listen to him!"* It is all about Him. The Spirit that Jesus promises to send points us to Jesus. He doesn't say it is all about me and my work. The Trinity is a community of caring and pointing to each other. We see that here in our text. Part of the glory of God is the way the Lord is not selfish—the selflessness of our Lord, and how he gives Himself for us.

Jesus had to come down from the mountains so that His glory could be revealed on that hill of shame that we just sang about where He would take away our sins. That's how

God's glory is revealed. Not in ways that humans would expect. Things that terrorize actually now bring to us comfort, because we know that the glory of God was there to encourage Jesus so that He would pay for our sins.

And now God reminds us that there are those that live in this world that still view God as something they have to be terrified of when they consider that He demands perfection. They don't know that Christ's glory is there for them to cover them. That is why the Lord has you and I coming down off the mountain--to share God's glory with others so that they might know and believe that Jesus is their Savior.

For you and I as a part of God's caring community here on earth, it is not all about us. It is not all about how we feel because of what God has done for us. That is an incredible blessing God has given to us. But God leaves us here so that you and I can share His glory with others. We live to glorify God in everything we think, say or do. We live to attract people so that we can share the Gospel. We live to share that Gospel with others. But sometimes the devil gets us tripped up thinking it's only about me, about me and how I feel. How I should be worried about my rights being served. And other people of the congregation should be more concerned about me and what I think. But look at the nature of the Trinity. They all point to one another. As we reflect the glory of God here on this earth, we are to love one another as Christ has loved us.

That is the calling He has given us. We do that as we share the Gospel with one another. We do it as we encourage one another—as we put other's interests ahead of our own and say, "How can I serve others?" instead of saying, "Why aren't they serving me?" We do it as we point those who don't know the truth to the incredible glory that is Jesus Christ. It is there for us in the word and in the sacraments. You and I are the torch bearers of God's glory. Either we can let it shine or we can hide it under a bushel, but God has given it to us. He has placed it in our hands.