

Feb 14, 2021 Transfiguration B
Mark 9:2-9 and 2 Kings 2:1-12
Where's the Glory?

I look at these 3 readings for today and here is what I see. I see Elisha getting to see God use a fiery chariot, fiery horses and whirlwind to sweep Elijah away, leaving behind a supernatural cloak which allows Elisha to do supernatural things. And I think that really must have impacted Elisha's relationship with God and how he served.

I see Peter, James and John getting to go up a mountain with Jesus where they get to see Jesus glow while spending time with 2 long-dead super heroes of the Old Testament, and hearing the voice of God come directly from heaven. And I think that really must have impacted Peter, James and John's relationship with God and how they went about serving Him.

And I hear Paul in our reading from 2 Corinthians talking about this same God who called forth all of creation is now using that same power to show us His glory in the face of Christ.

And I sit here in my hum drum, COVID-19 world, feeling very ordinary and routine, and in a rut, thinking "I could really use some of that GLORY now! Where's the glory in 2021?!"

So let's go looking for the glory.

When Epiphany began several weeks ago, we started with the arrival of the Magi and that same day we looked at the Baptism of Jesus and we heard these words in a voice coming from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Sound familiar? Today, this last Sunday of Epiphany, we hear that same voice from heaven speak again, "This is my Son, whom I love." But this time the voice adds, "Listen to him!"

The proclamations from heaven that bookend the season after Epiphany call our attention to one thing--to Jesus, God made flesh. Ours is a God who is heavenly, but also always drawing near, always breaking in.

Because we encounter Jesus in our lectionary readings from week to week, we are used to Him. While that's a good thing, these familiar stories can become predictable. Our God-made-human may begin to seem ordinary, par for the course, even routine.

It's natural, given our standard Sunday-to-Sunday routine, to long for an exciting, revelatory, glorious encounter with God. But, it's not often that

God comes to us in sudden bursts of mystifying revelation as He does to Peter, James, John, Elisha and Paul in this morning's readings. Their miraculous encounters with Jesus are quite different from their everyday experiences with him.

Mark tells us, "There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." Moses and Elijah appear with him, a bright cloud overshadows them, and God speaks. One might say that in the midst of the ordinary, these disciples experience the extraordinary.

It must be faith-affirming to experience God in such an amazing way, quite different from our run-of-the-mill encounters with Jesus in the lectionary. Seeing the face of God would certainly solidify one's belief. Can you imagine? It's not much of a stretch. Some people are so desperate to catch a glimpse of God that they begin to see God all over the place.

Maybe you have heard the stories of people seeing Jesus' face in a tortilla or a piece of toast? Maybe you have heard about a guy who claims to have recognized Christ's countenance on the side of a glass building when the light hits it just right. Or maybe you have personally noticed Jesus staring back at you from the foam swirled on top of your half-caf mochaccino, or, perhaps, from a distant rock formation. Sometimes the people of God are so lost or lonely or out of touch that they will grasp at straws—or even French fries—to catch a glimpse of the incarnate Word.

The desire to glimpse Jesus in unexpected and miraculous ways is understandable. It sure would make believing easier, but we do not typically encounter God in the miraculous. Instead, we encounter God in more subtle—yet equally important—ways.

Some folks find God in the woods on a foggy morning. Others see God in the housecat curled up in the sunshine. Some people meet God in their customers, patients, clients, and coworkers. You might even notice God in the cheerful demeanor of a passing stranger.

There may well be those among us who have had a "mountaintop" experience. Thunder crashes, lightning strikes, and God takes shape right before their eyes. But even they, like Peter, James, and John, must eventually walk back down to level ground. Even an extraordinary event can become an ordinary one after someone has a chance to turn it over in their head.

Instead of standing idle and waiting for God to be revealed to us in some extraordinary way, we are called to get up every day and look for Jesus'

presence in our ordinary lives. Admittedly, recognizing God at work in ordinary life can be difficult, especially when we face setbacks, sorrow, or general annoyance. But rest assured, God is there.

God is there with the widow whose Social Security check isn't quite enough to keep her in her home of over 50 years. God is there with the night school student who is late to class because her teenager got detention again. God is there with the young mother of four whose youngest refuses to potty-train. And God is even there with you when the cable guy doesn't show up between nine and noon.

All of God's people have bad days; the trick is learning to look for Jesus anyway. That's a habit that truly would be extraordinary! Anybody can recognize Jesus when times are good. Somebody's cancer is cured; they give the credit to God. Somebody meets an old flame and falls in love all over again; they claim that their prayers have been answered. Somebody gets a long-awaited raise; they give God the glory.

Just to be clear: there is absolutely nothing wrong with seeing God in the good; nor should it be our goal to see God exclusively in the bad, but it is necessary for us to look for God in the ordinary because the ordinary is what we have the most of.

Startling revelation is not necessary to convince us of the validity of our faith. Faithfulness does not grow out of God's unanticipated intervention but from a life spent looking for Jesus at all times, and in all the ordinary places.

Jesus is there in the, ordinary, the routines, even the ruts that our lives sometimes get into.

Ruts. I will never hear that word the same again. One of the best sermons I ever heard was preached, not by a pastor, but by a seminary student named Joel Pagan. He had spent much of his life in New Orleans and loved the music of New Orleans, particularly the funeral music. This week is Mardi Gras, so it's a good time to think about that.

I'll use his words for this part of the sermon: *There is a movement to it (New Orleans funeral music) that is unique and enticing, even welcoming. One tradition I am captivated by is that of the funeral march. The parade culture in New Orleans has a lot of its roots in funeral marches. Historically, it starts with a band leading the mourners with a solemn beat from the door of the church, through the city, to the grave site, though this rarely happens in New Orleans today. This is what they call the "first line". I might even call this the rut. The well-worn path from life to death from which no one will escape. Dust to dust.*

After the deceased is placed in the family crypt the band makes their way back through the city playing a different music. This is the “second line” and this parade music calls out with such passion and joy that people flock from their homes to join in the celebration. Celebration?! Yeah, celebration, and the parade that forms behind the band is a unique experience to behold. The second line may not know the deceased or the family, in fact they likely do not, but the band... wow, that sound, what is that?! It’s not something a passerby can hold at arm’s length and observe without it working its way through an asphalt pavement that’s warping in the heat of the sun. The beat comes up from the ground, it comes through the soles of shoes until everyone’s feet are pulsing to the textures of the music. Musically speaking there’s often a standard bass beat of 1 and 3 that’s been inherited from western marches, but the 1 and 3 are a bit “slushy” where the beat sometimes falls, as some drummers describe it, “in the crack”. Add to this a snare drum that’s free to move from 2 and 4 with syncopations, added notes, and shifting patterns of accents that are nowhere near a rut. The best word that anyone has for it is groove. These celebrations of a life on the streets of New Orleans, they groove! Even a frozen Minnesotan as I am can feel the shift in my spirit as the beat that falls into the cracks splits me wide. Literally a rut and a groove could be the same thing but musically, even spiritually they are different. They are death and life, and one might not even be able to exist without the other.

How do you move from the rut to the groove? Look for Jesus. When you finally do catch a glimpse of Him, your perspective will change in an instant. He may not always appear in the way you want Him to, or in the way you think He should, but nevertheless, He will be there. And there will be glory.

So, watch for him. And listen, too. You’ll know it when you hear it—that voice from heaven that rings in your ear, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to Him.”