

## O How Nice It Would Be

Mark 9:2-9

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, February 15, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Wouldn't it be great if the glory of Jesus just kept on going up and up? We have seen Jesus our Lord cast an unclean spirit out of a man in the synagogue at Capernaum. We have seen our Lord heal the sick by the droves. If the season of Epiphany were a little longer and Ash Wednesday a little later, we would have seen in the Divine Service our Lord purify a leper, restore a paralytic, and heal a man with a withered hand. We would have seen Him command the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee and we would have seen the wind and the waves obey Him. We would have seen Him take the hand of a little girl who had died and raise her from the dead. We would have seen Him feed five thousand men plus women and children using only five loaves of bread and two fish. We would have seen Him walk on the water and heal the deaf.

And at the end of it all Jesus stands on a mountain transfigured. His clothing became whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. He is speaking with Moses and Elijah. He is speaking to them on the top of a mountain just like He spoke to them from the top of Mount Sinai so very long ago. Jesus has brought Peter, James, and John along. They are now on the top of the mountain with Him and with Moses and with Elijah. Our Lord has elevated His apostles to the same level of authority as the prophets of the Old Testament. They have seen God on the top of a mountain in His glory.

Wouldn't it be great if the glory of Jesus just kept going up and up? Wouldn't it be great if He went down from the mountain with His clothing still white? Wouldn't it be great if Moses and Elijah would accompany Him down the mountain and follow Him on His mission? Wouldn't it be great if Jesus would heal not simply a few select blind people, but all of the blind people in the world? Wouldn't it be great if He had healed all of the deaf and restored all of the lame? Wouldn't it have been great if Jesus our Lord had removed sickness and disease from the earth? Wouldn't it have been great if He had raised all of the dead? Wouldn't it be great if He had cast out all of the unclean spirits and rendered all of their power null and void? Wouldn't it be great if the conquering Jesus would go on His way in conquest over the powers of evil without anyone to oppose Him? What if His enemies would have been rendered powerless before Him?

That is a Jesus that I could follow. That is a Jesus I could believe in: a Jesus that never fails, a Jesus whose glory continues to go up and up and whose glory never comes down.

The reason that I find such a Jesus so attractive is because that is the kind of glory that I want for myself. I want to be successful. But once I have achieved success, I want more success. Even if I receive more success, I still want more success. It seems like no matter how much success I meet with, I still want more success. Success is never enough. The yield could have always been bigger. We'll go for more next year. The attendance at church always could have been more. We'll go for more next Sunday. The grades always could have been better. We'll go for better grades next time. Or if our grades were perfect this semester we'll make sure that we do even more next semester. We'll take advanced placement courses. We could always win more basketball games next year. There is always more glory to be had.

And I would like a life in which my glory goes up and up. I do not want a life whose glory is variable. I do not want a life whose glory goes up and then whose glory goes down again. I do not want success followed by failure. I especially do not want public success to be followed by public failure.

Everyone seems to remember public failure more than they do public success. Just ask Brian Williams if you do not believe me or perhaps Dan Rather.

Because I do not want public failure or failure of any kind, I will take a Jesus who is a success. I will take a Jesus whose congregation will grow and grow and grow and never get smaller. I will take a life that will get better and better and better.

But that is not the kind of life that we have. That is not the kind of vocations that we have. That is not the kind of congregation that we have. That is not the kind of world that we have. We have a world with death in it.

No matter how successful you become, you will die. No matter how much money you make, you will die. And all of your money for which you worked so hard will go to someone else. And how do you know whether or not he will be wise with your money or foolish? Will your heirs understand how hard you worked to get all of that to leave to them?

No matter what you have achieved or how famous you become, you will die. And the people that have died which we remember are largely remembered because of the circumstances that happened to them rather than because of the kind of people that they were. I am sure there were other presidents of our nation as great as Abraham Lincoln but we know about his greatness because of the place in history in which he lived. If he had lived in a different place in history, would we remember him? And even though we consider his life to be great, would he have considered his own life to be great? He was oppressed by the ups and downs of life. He was oppressed by death, just like the rest of us. And even if they do remember in you in history, will you be around to enjoy your fame?

It seems that we Greeks would rather have everlasting fame in our deaths than simply everlasting life. But even death robs us of our everlasting fame. We are not around to enjoy it.

And failure is not limited only to death.

I would even take a life that had success throughout all of it and then ended in death. Many of us would consider that to be a good death. That is why so many of us want to die peacefully in our sleep. We do not want death to rob us of our health and vitality and then kill us. We would rather keep our health and vitality and simply die. I would take a healthy, successful, fulfilled life that simply ended in death. But death is not like that either.

Life is filled as much with failure as it is with success. We earn good grades and then we get bad ones. We are successful at basketball and then we fail. We are a successful athlete and then we are injured and we have to take the time to recover from the injury. The yield is good one year and bad the next and good the next and bad the next. Are we doing anything different that these different results come to us? We meet with success in our vocations and God is blessing us and then we meet with challenges in our vocations and God is against us. We are blessed with money and then there is something that takes all of the money away. We are healthy and then we are sick again. We achieve good health for a long time and then we get sick. We get sick and we wonder what happened to the healthy person that we used to be. We achieve a great success and then suddenly all of our success is taken away in a moment in a flash in the twinkling of an eye.

Oh and then to top off all of our failures, we die.

While I wish for a Jesus whose glory simply gets bigger and better all of the time, the only reason I wish for such a Jesus is a selfish one. I wish that my glory would get bigger and better all of the time. But if the glory of Jesus did get bigger and better all of the time, then such a Jesus would not mean much to me. What could such a Jesus say to me? What comfort could He possibly give? What would He say

besides, "Look how much I have achieved! Don't let others set your standards for you. Get up and keep trying!" Such a Jesus is oppressive to me. He does not deal with me as I really am, but as He wishes me to be. Such a Jesus is just a demanding glorious God on the top of a mountain telling me what I should have achieved with the ability that He gave me that I did not achieve and He has Moses and Elijah there to agree with Him.

Fortunately for you, that is not the Jesus that you have. The Jesus that you have is the one who was crucified. The One who speaks to Moses and Elijah on the mountain is the One who dies.

Peter is one of the apostles who was privileged to see Jesus on the top of the mountain. And well he should receive such a privilege. Peter had witnessed all of the miracles of Jesus. He had listened carefully to the teaching of Jesus. And when he had seen what Jesus did and heard what Jesus taught he was the one among the apostles who figured out who Jesus was. He confessed, "You are the Christ." He figured it out! He knew!

And once the apostles knew who Jesus was, He told them what it meant. He taught them that the Son of Man had to suffer many things. The Son of Man had to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes. He told them that the Son of Man had to be killed and on the third day rise again. And even though Jesus has told us that He would rise on the third day we object to His crucifixion. The Muslims object to the crucifixion of Jesus. They say that it is beneath a Messiah, a Christ, to be crucified. There are false Christians who even though they claim to be followers of the One from Nazareth, they never talk about His crucifixion. They are embarrassed to do so. In spite of the fact that a resurrection from the dead brings greater glory than avoiding death altogether, they would rather have a glorious Christ who never faces death at all. They would rather have a powerful Christ. They would rather have a Christ whose glory goes up and up and up and never goes down. They are afraid of the glory going down because if the glory goes down they fear it may fail which simply means that they do not trust in God. They are afraid that if the glory of Jesus goes down, they may have to deal with the fact that their own glory has gone down and they don't know what to do about it. And the honest to goodness fact is that their glory will go down if it has not gone down already. To try to act like one's glory is not going down when really it is, is pretense. It is false and your Jesus is not false. Your Jesus deals with you the way you truly are. Your Jesus deals with the world the way the world really is. He does not deal with it the way we pretend that it is.

Jesus purifies a leper. It is a great miracle. Jesus has awesome power and glory. The problem is that according to the word of God Himself touching a leper defiles you and places you outside of the presence of God. Jesus is now defiled and He will pay for that defilement with His life. The leper receives His purity at the expense of Jesus' life.

Jesus casts out a demon, but in order for the demon to remain cast out forever Jesus is going to have to deal with the power of demons and of Satan. The demons' chief power lies in their ability to accuse people of their sins. Therefore in order to render Satan and his angels powerless forgiveness must be procured for people. People will never live in such a way that Satan cannot accuse them. People will never be able to use the law to prove to Satan that they do not deserve God's wrath. The only way to put people beyond the power of Satan is to forgive them, but if Jesus forgives them, the atonement must be made. And God's own Word has said that there is no atonement unless blood is shed. Jesus knows that if there is to be a permanent casting out of Satan, He must shed His own blood. He must make the atonement that puts us beyond the powers of Satan and his angels.

Jesus raises the dead. But as soon as Jesus touches the little girl to raise her from the dead, He has defiled Himself. God's own Word teaches that touching a dead body defiles you. Jesus is now defiled. Unless He is purified, He will die outside of the presence God, He will die outside of the temple, He will die outside of the community, outside of Jerusalem. Someone must pay for His defilement and no one can. Therefore Jesus pays for His defilement Himself. He pays for it in the only way available to Him. He dies.

And when He dies the purification of the lepers are sealed. They cannot be unpurified. When He dies the demons are cast out permanently. They cannot get back in. When He dies the dead are raised incorruptible. They cannot be put back into their graves. And because this is the result of His death, His death becomes His glory.

This is the Jesus who deals with you the way that things are. This is the Jesus who deals with your sicknesses. This is the Jesus who deals with your sins. This is the Jesus who deals with your death. This is the Jesus who does not swoop past you in some kind of blaze of glory in a bright cloud. This is the Jesus who is capable of that, but who chooses to be with you anyway. This is the Jesus who chooses to be ordinary and who chooses to die. This is the Jesus who chooses to die for you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.