

2-3-2008, Transfiguration Sunday A
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

5. Shine, Jesus, Shine
The Light is the Glory of God
Matthew 17:1-9

Two years ago I was visiting my daughter in Washington, D.C. and attending a seminar. I had one afternoon free, and I decided to see the sights in our national capitol. I walked by the Supreme Court Building and the White House. I walked by the capitol building. I walked the mall past the Smithsonian buildings and all the way to the Lincoln Memorial. Then I walked back to the subway. It was early in April. It was a beautiful day, perfect weather. The sunshine felt good.

As I was walking back to the subway, I felt my forehead itching, and as I rubbed it, I realized I was sunburned. I hadn't been out in the sun all winter, and, as pleasant as the sun felt, I was not ready to spend several hours in the sun without a hat, even on a cool, pleasant day.

We have to protect ourselves from the sun. The sun is essential to life. We need the sun. But too much sun is dangerous. So, we wear hats and clothes and sunscreen to protect our skin from the sun, and we wear sunglasses to protect our eyes.

Even with sunglasses, we would never look directly at the sun. When there is a solar eclipse, we are always warned to use special devices to either watch the eclipse indirectly or to use highly filtered glass.

Our eyes cannot handle the fullness of the light of the sun. We would be blinded.

In the same way we cannot handle the full glory of Christ.

I brought an evangelist into our church to hold revival services one time. Talk about a powerful personality. This guy could fill a large room with his presence. In one of his sermons he actually talked about that. He told us that there were times when he had to hold back. He talked about being with people who became uncomfortable when he would let the light of Christ shine too powerfully through him. He could tell they were uncomfortable because they would start looking away, as if it hurt their eyes to look at him. He said that you don't put a spotlight in a refrigerator.

If that is true of an ordinary human being, how much more must that have been true of the Son of God. Jesus only allowed people to see as much of his glory as they could handle.

That is why he only took Peter, James and John with him up to the Mount of Transfiguration. He knew that the three of them were ready to see more of his glory. That night the barrier between heaven and earth was opened up there on that mountaintop. Moses and Elijah came down to talk with Jesus. And Jesus allowed his glory to shine brightly, not nearly as bright as he could have shone, but bright enough to wake up the disciples. Luke tells us that they had been fighting to stay awake.

Have you ever been awakened during the night by a bright light? I recall several years ago we were living in Texas City. It was during annual conference, and I was commuting into downtown Houston that week. I woke up one morning before the alarm went off. To my surprise it was broad daylight. I jumped up and started getting dressed, thinking I had overslept. When I looked out the window, I thought to myself that the

morning sky looked strange. It had an orange tinge to it. Then it suddenly got even brighter. I ran back upstairs and looked out a window in the other direction, just in time to see a huge fireball. One of the refineries was on fire. It was an awesome sight. Thank goodness, although there was a lot of damage, no one was seriously injured.

It was only then that I realized that it was actually about 3 o'clock in the morning, and I had been awakened from a deep sleep by a bright light.

As the disciples were struggling to stay awake, suddenly they were jolted to full awareness by a bright light. When they looked around in confusion to see where the light was coming from, they realized it was Christ. Christ was shining. His face was as bright as the sun.

It was almost too much for the three of them. They were dazed and confused. Peter started rambling incoherently about building huts for Christ and for Moses and Elijah there on the mountaintop. My guess is that Peter was really thinking that they needed to build a shelter to put Christ in that would shield them from the overwhelming light of his glory.

Jesus had pushed Peter, James and John to their limit. This was as much of the glory of God as they were able to stand.

Just how great is the glory of the Lord? Revelations tell us that in the New Jerusalem, there will be no sun or moon. The glory of God will provide the light and warmth and energy that will give life eternally to those who dwell in the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem will be made up of people who can endure being in the presence of the glory of God.

How great is the glory of God? Well, all the stars in the sky are suns. And the combined light of all the billions of suns in the universe would disappear in the light of the glory of God.

But, until we are ready, Christ only reveals as much of his glory as we can receive. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13, "Now we see as in a mirror dimly." I was telling the people who attended Dora Jenkins service last Monday that the mirror Paul was talking about was much different than the mirrors we have. They were highly polished pieces of metal. The best of them were dim and distorted in comparison to the mirrors we now have, kind of like looking at your reflection on the back of a spoon. So, the glory of the Lord that we see is filtered. We see as in a mirror dimly. But, Paul goes on to say, "Then we will see face to face."

God is preparing us to be able to see God's unfiltered and undiminished glory.

There are times when we become jaded, thinking we have seen it all, that there is nothing left that can overwhelm us with awe and wonder, that there is nothing left to get excited about.

When those times come, remember that you have only seen a cloudy reflection of the glory of God. We will look gaze upon the glory of the Lord for all eternity and never lose our sense of awe and wonder. Pray that God will enable you to grow in your capacity to look upon God's glory.

And pray that God will enable you to grow in your capacity to reflect the glory of Christ.

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