

February 19, 2023 – Exodus 24:8-18, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9

There's been a lot of talk of “glory” in the days since the Chiefs won the Super Bowl last Sunday. There was Jerick McKinnon, sacrificing personal glory by NOT scoring a touchdown. There was Harrison Butker, who made the game winning field goal, but declared during his press conference after the game, “All glory to God.” There was the glory of the team returning home to a sea of red and gold, as ten of thousands of people lined the streets of Kansas City to welcome them. A parade that a couple of our members even attended.

Human beings like glory. We like to succeed and receive the glory. We like cheer people on and give them glory. We like to be part of a glorious event. I'm not even really a Chief's fan, but I enjoyed watching them win last week. I enjoyed seeing the fireworks and the field buried in confetti and Patrick Mahomes lifting the Lombardi Trophy over his head. It was fun. It was glorious.

But, of course, as Christians, we need to put worldly glory in its proper place. There's a fine line between cheering for a team and worshipping that team. Between enjoying sports and idolizing sports.

Perhaps then, we need to take a minute and understand that concept of glory a little better. We know what glory looks like when we look at a professional athlete or a team. But what does glory look like for God. What is the glory of God? And how do we give and receive God's glory?

Well, today is a good day to ask those questions. Because today is Transfiguration Sunday. It's a day all about God's glory. Glory in the Old Testament. Glory in the New Testament. Glory in our own lives. And, as it turns out, those are three very different kinds of glory. You wouldn't necessarily expect that, but it's true. God's glory is revealed in three completely different ways in these three lessons.

We'll start by looking at the Old Testament Lesson. The Israelites have just arrived at Mount Sinai. God has freed them from Egypt with ten terrible plagues, concluding with the death of every first born Egyptian. He has brought them through the Red Sea, drowning pharaoh's chariots in a scene that must have been absolutely horrific to witness. He has led them by a massive pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

And he has brought them here. To the very mountain where he first called Moses to be his prophet and the leader of these people. When God first appeared to Moses it was in a voice that came from a small bush. A bush that burned... but didn't. That alone was terrifying enough for Moses. He kicked off his shoes and fell on his face the moment God told him to.

So just imagine what this scene must have looked like when God calls to Moses on Mount Sinai a second time: *“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.”*

A devouring fire on the top of the mountain. That's the glory of the Lord in this lesson. You know what came to mind when I read this. It was the description that Tim Fahrenbrink gave of the fire in Wooldridge last summer. A fire that just sweeps through and destroys everything in its path. So fast, so hot, there's absolutely nothing you can do to stop it. Nothing you can do to even slow it down. A fire that just eats up everything in its path. A devouring fire.

And this is what Moses has to walk into. And he doesn't know if it's going to devour him. The Israelites don't know if it's going to come down the mountain and devour them. And it is there, in the midst of this devouring fire of God's glory, that Moses receives the Law.

The Law that is itself a devouring fire. It's a fire that just sweeps through and destroys everything in its path. So fast, so hot, there's absolutely nothing you can do to stop it. Nothing you can do to even slow it down. God's Law judges sinners swiftly and brutally. And His wrath consumes them like fire. Until there's nothing left.

The glory of God can be terrifying. Because the Law is the glory of God and it is terrifying. A devouring fire against sinners.

But that isn't the whole glory of God. No, we see a different aspect of God's glory in the account of the Transfiguration. And this is the glory of God that I think we normally think of when we try to picture God's glory.

It's the glory of Jesus going up onto another mountain, just as Moses did. The glory of him being transfigured before the disciples. Changed until his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. The glory of Moses and Elijah, the great prophets of old, standing with him. Talking with him. No doubt, worshipping him.

But then, this display of God's glory makes another connection to the glory of Mount Sinai. For just as God descended on the mountain in a cloud then, so also he descends now. Not in a cloud of devouring fire, but a cloud of bright light. So bright that it overshadows them.

Which is kind of a funny statement. How does something "bright" overshadow you? But, I suppose, if it's so bright that it blinds you, makes you cover your eyes and turn your head away, as if did for the disciples, then it is an overshadowing.

From that cloud that covers them, we don't hear God inviting them to come and receive God's Law. No, they hear the voice of the Father proclaim that this is His beloved Son. A Son who pleases the Father. A Son they need to listen to. For He is a gift to them. He is the Father's grace poured out on them. He is not the devouring Law. He is the life-giving Gospel. The good news of their salvation.

There was no comfort for Moses or the Israelites on Mount Sinai. It was terrifying and it was supposed to be terrifying. That was the intended reaction. But at the Transfiguration, when the disciples become afraid, Jesus comes to them. He touches them. And he comforts them. *"Rise, and have no fear."* I'm not here to make you afraid. I'm here to show you love and mercy and compassion. I'm here to give you peace.

God's glory is in his Law. God's glory is in his Gospel. And, finally, God's glory is in his Word. And that's the message that Peter takes away from this event. Peter who foolishly seeks to cling to this moment of God's glory by setting up tents and staying on the mountain forever.

He eventually comes to learn that there is an even greater glory of God for us. Greater than seeing the devouring fire of God on Mount Sinai. Greater even than seeing the transfigured Christ.

He says that he and the other disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty on the holy mountain. Eyewitnesses to his majestic glory. They heard the voice of the father. And now he has given that prophetic Word to us. And if we pay attention to it, it is *"a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."*

You see, that Law and Gospel, that Word of God that we receive from the prophets and apostles, that's the glory of God too. It is God's glory to shine a light into your heart. To be a lamp shining in the darkness of a sinful world. Until that day when Christ returns in glory and a new day dawns, a new morning star rises.

As Christians, we seek the glory of God is lots of different ways, and not all of them are good. You see, we have a tendency to seek God's glory in the same way that we seek human glory. The Chiefs reveled in their glory with fireworks and confetti and parades. A great many Christian churches like to use fancy lights and sound systems and fog machines.

And it's well-intentioned. We want to give God glory. We want to be surrounded with God's glory. We want to be in a place that brings us the awe of Mount Sinai and the majesty of the mountain of Transfiguration.

But that's not where God's glory is found anymore. No, his glory is found in his Word. His glory is found in the testimony that he died and rose again. And that by his blood our sins are forgiven. By his resurrection, we also have the hope of resurrection.

God's glory is found in the working of his Word in our hearts. And in the working of his Word in bread and wine and water. God's glory is found every time a sinner hears the Law and says, "God, I'm sorry for my sin." And God's glory is found every time a pastor proclaims, "I forgive you all your sins."

And, you know, that actually makes it a lot easier to distinguish worldly glory from Godly glory. We can cheer on our sports teams and shoot off fireworks and confetti and throw them a parade. And yet that glory will never compare to the glory of God's Word telling us how much we are loved by God and how He will return on the clouds of glory to gather us to himself. That like Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, may behold God and eat and drink on his holy mountain for all eternity. Amen.