

During a basketball game people act different than they would just walking down the street. A competitiveness comes out, a drive to win, and a desire to play well. That's what I saw this weekend in our school kids in Dallas. They played with emotion, they played with drive, and they played with passion. These qualities aren't totally gone when they're in class or walking the halls. But they're certainly subdued. You understand too. Even if you don't play basketball you know you act one way in certain situations and completely different in others. The question is which one is the real you?

People thought they knew Jesus. The son of a carpenter, student, and scholar. He was very smart and knew a lot about God and Old Testament ways. He became known as a brilliant teacher and model citizen. He never got in trouble, was always polite, and went out of his way to help people. To the casual observer Jesus was nothing more. Did anyone know the real Jesus, the one just below the surface. Probably best they didn't because it could've been misunderstood and misused for sinful purposes.

While the Transfiguration of Jesus appears on the calendar each year it might be one of those Christian days that doesn't register as special. But the events that happened on the mountainside are vital to our faith. We need to keep it in the proper perspective. We must be careful not to do what Jesus feared the disciples or the people would do with the sights he was going to give them. We can do that as we study this morning the gospel and say with Peter...

**It's good to be here
Getting a glimpse of glory
Preparing for the suffering**

Six days earlier the question was posed to the disciples, ***"Who do you say I am?"*** Jesus wanted to know where they were in their faith after the better part of two years with him. As usual Peter spoke for everyone. ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*** Perfect, beautiful, well said. Peter's shining moment. Just moments later Jesus said that he would suffer and die. Peter rebuked him for even saying something like that. Jesus replied by calling Peter Satan and a stumbling block to the plan of salvation. Not Peter's greatest moment. But now Peter was one of three disciples going with Jesus up the side of a mountain. Jesus had something to show them that would confirm what they believed and confessed.

You might have times you can remember where you felt a miracle happened to you. A time in which it just felt like God reached down and made things go your way. But have you ever had three miraculous and glorious things happening to you at the same time? The three disciples could only stare in wonder. ***"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus."*** Then ***"a bright cloud enveloped them, and voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'"***

As the glory of the moment sets in, Peter with a little fear and a lot of awe stammers, ***"If you wish, I will put up three shelters."*** Foolish Peter. Like most of the time his mouth moved before he thought. He wanted the mountaintop experience to last. This was no mere angel or human being they'd been spending time with. This was not just someone really smart, powerful, or truthful. This was the almighty God himself, come down to earth to take on the flesh of a human being. But he never lost his divinity. Jesus never stopped being God even when his divinity was veiled with human flesh. He was truly man and truly God.

You and I have stood in God's presence. Even today, right here, it doesn't happen without grace. It doesn't happen without the eternal son of God granting us the ability to enter God's presence by his death and resurrected life. Jesus' transfiguration is proof of who Jesus claimed to be. We get this glimpse of his glory so we know he's victorious. Everything he did was pleasing to God. His perfect life was just what God demanded for our sins. This glimpse of glory allows us to be completely certain that when he hangs on that cross his life will be acceptable to God for payment.

A reaction like Peter's would be completely natural. Why stop the glory when being in God's presence can take away fears, relieve us of troubles, and make us feel safe. Maybe we should stay here at church in God's presence all day. We're safe among other Christians. Sin is forgiven here. We're seeing and singing about the glory of Christ here. But we must leave, not because we don't have facilities to allow you to stay. Because trying to have the glory now is mistimed. It isn't time for glory...yet. It's only time for glimpses of the glory to remind us that the true glory is coming.

It's always harsh reality the day after a vacation. Work returns, schoolwork comes back, and time seems to matter again. Jesus touched the disciples and brought back the harsh realities of their world. It was no dream, but the Old Testament figures, the cloud, and the voice were all gone and only Jesus was left looking like before. Peter's attempt to keep the glory going was a failure. It had to be. He had tried to keep Jesus from suffering, a second time. The reality for Jesus and us is that suffering always precedes the glory. Jesus had to move because he had places to go. Nothing would keep Jesus from completing his mission. Jerusalem was the final destination, Jesus' final earthly destination. The disciples had seen the glory, but first the suffering.

You probably remember moments you wished would never end. The high of winning a championship. The first day you laid eyes on your child. The day of graduation. These moments were so glorious we would've given anything for them to continue. And we want everyone to know about them. So the instruction Jesus gives is surprising. **"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'"** Why Jesus? Glory is better than suffering. Let's tell everyone. Let's ignore the suffering and downplay what's coming. Let's escape to the mountainside and avoid talk of life and death. But Jesus knew the disciples and people thought of him as a revolutionary, a great teacher, and not the Savior. If we think those things we become part of the group that picks and chooses what parts of Jesus they want. We'll take the great teacher and kind friend. We'll leave off suffering servant and dying criminal.

The encouragement God gives the disciples on the mountain is the same he gives to us today. **"Listen to him!"** Jesus willingly came to face suffering. He came to complete the suffering so you wouldn't have to. Jesus' death and departure were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy and promises of God. To be here today with Jesus on the mountain is good because it prepares us for the suffering ahead. The suffering Jesus will endure and the suffering we will too.

Looking again at the transfiguration of Jesus fans into flame the heavenly hope that we have. It changes how we live. Peter would later write in one of his own letters, **"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place."** Peter guarantees the words of the prophets are confirmed in the actions of Jesus. We have not seen Jesus' glory face to face and yet we're sure. How? We have the Scriptures which tell the story. We can relive that moment on the mountain over and over again. We can go to a hundred other promises of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for us. We face death without fear, we face life with certainty, and we face eternity with hope in Christ.

Do you ever wish you could just yell "freeze" when something really great happened? You make the game winning shot, freeze. You have an incredible date with someone, freeze. You experience an awesome worship service, freeze. It sounds great. We would love just like those three disciples to freeze Jesus at a moment of glory. Stop the motion right at the mountaintop experience where his glory is shining. Those kinds of experiences don't come around often. But heaven is not on this side of the grave. First the suffering then the glory. This earth will always have suffering. But we wait for a Savior from heaven to take us back with him to heaven. That's the glory for later. Getting a glimpse is great because it prepares us for the suffering now. It is good to be here.