

SERMON – “*The Glory of Jesus*”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to glimpse the authentic Christ, human and divine, and follow him into discipleship.

One of my grandfather’s favorite stories to tell as a children’s sermon was “The House with the Golden Windows.” In the hill country, there lived a family with a large white house on the top of a hill. One day, the Fuller Brush traveling salesman stopped by to sell them a broom. After the transaction, he asked them if they had ever noticed ‘the house with the golden windows.’

“I’ve never heard of such a thing!” Father exclaimed, and neither had any of the others.

“Well, it’s a house on a hill, painted white, with extraordinary windows. Instead of being made of glass, they are made of shining pure gold! Magnificent!”

“This house is kind of shabby.” Mother said, glancing around, “If there is such a house, I would like to see it.”

“Maybe we could get our hands on some of that gold!” the older son exclaimed.

They decided then and there to search for the house. “I’d love to join you,” the traveling salesman replied, “but I’ve got a sales quota to make.”

Mom, Dad and the three children put on walking sneakers and headed out in search of the house with the golden windows. They went a mile one way, then circled back by another route, and headed off once again. Each time they reached a destination, they examined the windows, but none were made of gold.

Discouraged, the daughter said, “This is hopeless, let’s go home!”

But the older son insisted, “We can’t be that far from finding it. Let’s not give up yet.” The search continued without success. They found themselves in a part of town they had never visited before, dreadfully far from home. The day grew tired, and the sun was low on the horizon as they walked over the rise of the next hill. “There!” Dad exclaimed, “There on that distant hill! Do you see it?” Sure enough, as each looked up they spotted the house with the golden windows sparkling in the distance. “Let’s go directly to it,” Dad encouraged with a quickened pace.

Leaving the road, they scrambled through pastures, stone walls, brush-piles and wooded forests. They traversed a stream, and thankfully no one fell in. The flashing gold did not dim as they approached their destination—if anything, the windows shown more brightly as they approached.

Entering a clearing at the base of the hill where the house stood in all its glory, they stopped. “Wait a minute,” one of them observed, “that house—why that house is OUR house!” And sure enough it was. The rays of the sun, shining on the glass of their windows made the house come alive in a bath of gold. Without saying a word they went in and began

to live together knowing that the house they longed for so much was the one they already had. They were already living in the House with the Golden Windows.

Sometimes it takes distance and perspective to see a miracle of God's making. How wonderful it is to have the ordinary peeled back long enough to glimpse the wonder of God's grace! In the text from Matthew that we are about to read, we witness an extraordinary event in the life of Jesus—one that shows his closest followers who he really is...

Read: Matthew 17:1-9.

In the chapter preceding our text, there is significant debate about who Jesus is and what his significance is. The Pharisees and Sadducees test him to discredit his prophetic witness as one sent from God. Jesus then turns to his disciples and asks them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Some say John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets," they reply. "But who do you say that I am?" Jesus presses.

Simon Peter answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus commends Peter for his insight and tells him it is a revelation from God. Yet four verses later, after Jesus tells the disciples of his coming arrest, suffering and death, Peter protests. Jesus then rebukes him, saying, "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me by setting your mind on human things rather than divine." Inspiring words of God are spoken one moment, tempting words of Satan the next.

The question of Jesus' authentic identity is not academic; it is crucial to the mission of redemption for which he came to earth. If his disciples are to amplify his message to the world following his crucifixion, they must know Jesus in his divinity as well as his humanity. Jesus does not take them up the mountain to impress Peter, James and John, though they certainly come away impressed. He yearns to be known authentically by his dearest friends. He knows the heart of Peter. He knows the heart of John. He knows the heart of James, but now, he wants them to know his heart. He takes them up the mountain to witness the unveiling of his real, authentic, transparent self.

They know the human Jesus. They have eaten meals with him, prayed with him, talked long hours into the night. They have seen him tired, sleeping, working and partying. They have seen his compassion in action and they have even witnessed his anger. What they have not seen is his God-self, but that is about to change. While on the mountain, probably Mount Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi, which is 9,000 feet high, 3,000 feet higher than

Mount Katahdin, Jesus is transfigured. A shining cloud envelopes him which Peter, James and John would instinctively identify with the Shekinah glory of the Exodus wanderings of the Israelites. In Torah, the physical representation of God's presence is a cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, resting upon the Tent of Tabernacles. While in God's presence, for example, Moses' face shines so brightly that he has to wear a veil over his face for an extended time after encountering God.

While he is transfigured, Jesus is visited by two prophets of Hebrew tradition, Moses and Elijah. And if the combination of the shining and prophet appearances is not enough, the voice of God is heard saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!"

I love Peter's reaction to the transfiguration of Jesus. When he sees Moses and Elijah, coupled with the brightness of his glory, he blurts out a silly, awkward thing: "Lord, it is good we are here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Probably, he recognized the allusion to the Tent of Tabernacles and this was an attempt to honor the sacred moment, but it sounds rather trite in context. In this moment of singular intimacy, of true revelation, Peter slices the tension with a very human proposal. Yet isn't that the way of authentic intimacy? Knowing, loving, accepting one another in foolishness as well as seriousness?

God spells it out for the disciple witnesses and perhaps for us as well. Jesus is God's Son, Beloved, One to be listened to, followed, and above all, loved. You know, when it comes down to it, Faith Journeys, Bible studies, sermons and worship services, retreats and mission trips are all ways of inviting us up to the mountain to see Jesus as he truly is—Creator, Friend, Prophet, Savior, King, Son of Man and Son of God. They are opportunities to enter into an intimacy with God that alone can nourish--emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. Such a climb requires a naked honesty: stripping away pretense, trappings of church, masks of holiness and prejudice. Then we can approach God as we are rather than as we pretend to be.

When we do this with integrity, then maybe, just maybe, we will discover that the Christian journey isn't so much a mountain-climb as it is a listening to one's own heart. We might discover that the House with the Golden Windows is our own house, after all.