

Sermon Text: Luke 9:28-36

Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of every heart be acceptable unto You, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I'm going to ask our soundman, Dr. Steve, to turn up the pulpit mike just a little bit. In case my voice gets weak, I want the mike to be strong. There we go.

Not long ago, a radio station, a talk radio station, maybe not quite that much, there we go, a talk radio station in San Francisco, KGO, conducted a call-in poll. Just using fast talking and dialing-up as many people as they could and letting as many callers on the line, you know, speak their piece as fast as they could, they kind of manipulated the situation, and they got people to vote, hundreds of people to vote on a poll. Steve, you'd better cut that down just a little bit. I'll just talk loud. They got hundreds of people to talk on this poll and call in the radio station and vote. The funny thing was 35% of them said yes and 33% of them said no and 32% of them were absolutely undecided. Now, that's a kind of a third, third, and third kind of thing. One listener was absolutely aghast that a third of the people who called in were undecided. He said that sort of apathy is what is ruining America! The problem with this whole endeavor was that at the beginning of the poll, the radio station, as a joke, had never, ever stated a question! There was no question! A third were adamantly for it, a third were against it, and a third were undecided! Even without knowing the question, they had strong opinions.

There are four or five, I lose track, 24-hour news shows on cable and satellite, and we all listen to one or the other, and we all feel obligated to have an opinion. We get worn out just having opinions. Most people, and you may find this insulting, but it's been my experience that most people just echo the opinions of those they like. It saves time. We can be passionate about our opinions – even ones we adopt. To whom do we listen? It matters. To whom do we listen to help us decide how we make our decisions in life?

Every Orthodox Hebrew boy goes through a bar mitzvah, and when he does, he has to learn a little bit of Hebrew – even if he's an American or a South Carolinian. He has to learn a little bit of Hebrew. One thing that every good Jewish person knows is the shimah. It goes SHMA Israel adonai elohayu adonai echad and it means, “listen up, listen up, be quiet. The Lord is one. The Lord is God.” There is one God, and it is the Lord, the Lord of Isaac and Abraham and Jacob. Listen up! There is one Lord.

As Christians in the New Covenant building upon that Old Covenant, we say, and that Lord, listen up, has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. It matters to whom we listen and how we decide.

You know, choosing a denomination is a decision, but mostly I'm afraid, we choose denominations on externals and on superficial things, mostly I'm afraid. The heart of faith, the reality of sin, trusting God as Savior, trusting Jesus as the Lord of our lives, and seeking to grow spiritually and change, these are real things, real questions, mostly, these

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real things are mostly off limits even in Sunday school, even in church. That's why I need to get away sometimes. That's why I need to get away. When I do, even if it's for just one day, I go to the mountains. Last year, I took off two days right before the Maundy Thursday service, and I came back refreshed and renewed. It was great! There's something about walking up the steep hiking trails in the mountains and the trees and the raw rocks that make me feel closer to God and closer to the peace that I wish I had every day. A walk in the mountains is for me a prayer of sorts. If you add to that walk in the mountains true prayer, you begin to see the world and yourself and everything differently.

It was on a high mountain, the story we have heard, it was on a high mountain that Peter and John and James saw Jesus differently. They saw him as he actually was. All their opinions and all their listening to the crowd about how the Messiah would be, fell away. When they saw Him with His face dazzling light, when they saw Him standing near, but dominating over the top of the representative of the law, Moses, and standing above the representative of all the prophets, Elijah, they saw Him glowing as bright as the sun. Those who look at Jesus through prayerful eyes and see Him as the light of the world and see Him in relationship to all that has come in the past, through all the law and all the prophets and all that will be and the final consummation of God's Kingdom as He said of Himself, He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. When we understand Jesus in that way, it is life changing. It will sustain you, the things you must face.

But there is more! When you heard what Paul was saying in our second lesson from 2 Corinthians, you need to know that he was writing to a church that had just experienced a very nasty conflict. He said this, “And all of us with unveiled faces see the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror. All of us are being transformed.” We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord, the spirit. We are being changed. All of us are becoming more than we can imagine. If we look at each other, if we look at ourselves through prayerful eyes of love, we will see something that can bring us to our knees in awe. There is so much more to see than our physical appearances. On the inside, where normal light and normal eyes cannot see, God is changing us.

As Paul says, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, and this is by the power and through the Lord, the spirit. We are being changed. This Scripture I have so often preached is a wonderful story. It's a miracle on a mountaintop. When we preach it that way, and we experience it passively, it doesn't get to the heart of the matter. Paul takes that imagery down and says we, too, you and I, are being changed, from one degree to another into that same glory.

I took a picture of one of our members, a longtime member. I will not say whom. She is a very beautiful lady on the inside and on the out, and I consider myself a bit of a photographer, and I thought it was a good picture. I printed it out, and I handed it to her in the office one day, proudly, waiting for the thank you. She said, “Who is that old woman?”

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There is more to us than meets the eye. We are being changed on the inside. A softening, a warming, a forgiving and more Christ-like nature, sooner or later, maturing through our faith; we are becoming what we are meant to be. It may be that when we are fully mature spiritually on the inside, it may be that our outsides, how can I say this, passed our freshness dates. It may be that we attain some chronological age before we fully mature. Blessed are those who get wisdom when they are young. Unfortunately, I have noted over the years that most wisdom comes from pain. Truly blessed are those who get wisdom with the least amount of pain possible.

Wisdom begins with knowledge of who God is and who you are in relationship to God. We are a dependent sinner, but beloved by God, and then we know that all others are in the same position. We are not extraordinary. We are not extraordinary in that we are sinners. All are. We are not extraordinary in that we are beloved of God. All are. You are no better than the worst you might be tempted to judge. Compassion comes from God and from knowing who you are on the inside.

On that mountain, Jesus was revealed as pure light in which there was no darkness at all. Pure love and pure wisdom of God outshining Moses the lawgiver, outshining Elijah the great prophet. Imagine what they saw! We rarely see ourselves. We rarely take a serious look at our own selves. Too many other people's faults catch our eyes for us to look at ours, but looking at Jesus' essence, they saw purity and light and brightness outshining everything which came before, and this is our destiny, to reflect that great light, to remove the muddled darkness and confusion and depression and misguided guilt and pain. To remove all of that distorted, unreflecting surface and shine. Paul says, "And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. This comes from the Lord the spirit."

You were made for more than guilt and pain and confusion and fear. You were made to reflect God's light and purity, and dare I say it, a word we don't use often, holiness, holiness in your lives. Are we? Are we fully? Okay, let me give you the loophole. The loophole in Paul's letter says from one degree of glory to another. That means some of us are beginning the path, and we're looking up at the mountain. Some of us are midway up the mountain, stuck and maybe tempted to look back down. Some of us are sitting down satisfied with ourselves and growing no more, and others, others slowly, prayerfully, taking the path of most resistance, the narrow way, the upward way, are moving toward Jesus Christ. Jesus, above the law. Jesus, above the prophets. Jesus, above your career, above your money, above your fame, above hatred, above pettiness, above grudges, Jesus, above all.

The goal of our lives is this upward narrow way of moving, ever moving toward Jesus Christ as our Lord, as our God, as our destination. The secret, the secret is that we often act as if we have been to the top of the mountain. We act as if we have been to the top of

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the mountain, and we have not. We have not. We act as if we are on a journey, but in fact, we have been parked in the picnic area for years.

Caroline and I like to do short day hikes when we go out of town. We like to do little five or six-hour hikes. Usually, they are two or three-hour hikes, and we get lost, and they turn into five or six-hour hikes. Thank goodness for the little satellite things that, you know, guide you back! Well, when we drive around in the mountains in our car, when we see one of those Appalachian Trail signs, we always stop, and have our camera with us so we take pictures of us next to the Appalachian Trail sign. We have hiked short sections of the Appalachian Trail, but you know this thing is hundreds of miles long. We never miss the opportunity to have our picture made in front of the Appalachian trail marker because somebody, sometime years from now, might see that picture, and they might mistake it for proof that we've hiked further on that trail than we actually have, and we might just let them believe that. After all, pictures don't lie.

You know, we all come to church. Most of us have our pictures in the church directory, and that makes us full-fledged, mature representatives of the holiness of Jesus Christ. Doesn't it? We're in the directory. You see, we do allow people to believe that we have more of the spirit of Christ in us than we do, and we do behave that way here in this building. I don't know how much of Christ reflects in your life when you are away from here. I don't know how determined you are to make moving up and growing closer to Jesus Christ a real goal in your life. I don't know. I hope that you do. I hope those close to you can see it, sooner or later, maybe not all at once, but see that we are being transformed into the same image, that glow that has come forth from Christ, that same image, from one degree of glory to another. This is not our doing. It comes from the Lord and from the Spirit.

This journey, this upward journey we are taking together is not just for looks. It is for keeps. This journey of faith is to change us, to forever change us, and to prepare us to live Godly, compassionate lives here, and to live forever with God in Heaven. Peter misunderstood. I'm afraid many modern churchgoers misunderstand. Peter wanted to build some booths, and he wanted to just sit and watch Jesus – the great and powerful. He wanted to build some shacks, and maybe invite others to come and see, and passively watch and passively see the great Jesus for a limited time only, not one, not two, but three great prophets, come and see! Come and sit, and passively watch them contained in their booths. What a show!

I do hope that you know that worship, worship is not a show. The music may be excellent, but it is not for entertainment. My words may sometimes wax eloquent, and I may occasionally turn a clever phrase, but a sermon is not a show, not a show to passively enjoy, or when it's bad to dreadfully endure. Either way it is not a show. We are here to be filled, to be in the presence of the living God and strengthened by God's spirit for the journey, given courage and enlightenment, enlightenment in more ways than one, for all that we must face, for all that we must endure, for all that we must forgive out there.

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The journey of faith is hard. It is a climb. It is not a travelogue of how other greats have climbed the trail. It is real power for us as we climb, as we catch our breaths, and as we leave the rest stops and set our faces toward Jesus, our hope, our help, our destination, our God. The secret is out. We do not follow a teacher Jesus. We do not follow a political organizer Jesus. We have faith in a God, who came to us as the man, Jesus.

Peter, James and John on the mountain saw Jesus become transparent and glow with the glory of God shining through Him, but still they didn't completely understand until later. It took Jesus' death and resurrection to finally change them. Only when they realized that the risen, glorified Jesus trusted them to carry the message, trusted them to reveal all the secrets free of charge, unlimited access to everyone, only then and with God's spirit within them did they begin to glow.

The same is true for you and for me. We hear people telling us that being Christian is all about what you do, but that's not quite right. We hear people tell us that being a Christian is all about what you believe, but that's not quite right either. Being a Christian is first of all about whom you trust. It is about whom you trust. We trust God in Christ. God knows we are sinners, and we know that God revealed in Jesus Christ that He loves us just the same, and has gone to great lengths to forgive us. We can trust Him not only to forgive us, but to empower us with His spirit to begin to glow and grow ourselves with the same love and compassion that Christ has given us. We can be able to give others. When we trust God in Christ and see only Jesus as the highest goal of our lives, we too begin to glow.

As you go through your week, the rest of this week, look carefully at the people you encounter. Try to see them with God's eyes, and if you see no sign of God's Spirit in them, stop and remind yourself why we are being transformed, why God has given us this power. We are being transformed so that we can reflect Christ to others. We are the only Jesus some people will see this week, so let His light shine through **you**. We all listen to someone. We all echo someone. The Scripture says listen to Him. Echo His light. Echo His love. We may be the only Jesus some people see. Amen.