

**"Majesty and Ministry"**  
**Sermon for Transfiguration Sunday**  
**Lectionary Year A**  
**March 6, 2011**  
**Text: Matthew 17:1-9**  
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I have to confess something to you this morning: ministry can be dull and boring. It can be rather mundane. It can become routine and rather monotonous. It's often hard work without necessarily having the opportunity to see any results of the effort put into it. A lot is demanded of being in ministry, and there are many days when the rewards are pretty illusive.

As it often is with many other jobs, even those in the helping profession, ministry can feel like all duty without much dividend. I'm not complaining; it's the life I have chosen in response to a specific call of God to serve as an ordained clergy. Nevertheless, because the calling often is far less glamorous or exciting than it perhaps was expected to be and far more difficult and problematic than it perhaps was expected to be, discouragement easily can be felt by those of us who are professional ministers.

But every once in a while, thanks be to God and his grace, we can catch a glimpse of the majesty of God, and when we do, it makes ministry worthwhile. From time to time we who are in ministry have

the overwhelming opportunity to witness the extraordinary character of God in a profound way, and that tends to balance out, at least to a certain extent, the rather ordinary character of ministry. I think such was the case for Jesus' inner circle of disciples when he took them up a high mountain with him so that they could participate with him in his transfiguration.

It is a spectacular event, beyond our wildest imaginings. In that moment, Jesus' entire appearance is changed to reflect God's own glory. Christ's status and importance in Israel's salvation history is confirmed by his conversation with Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, and demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus' life and ministry are to be seen as a continuation and extension of both of those important religious traditions within Judaism.

To make the event even more dramatic, God himself speaks to the disciples to confirm that Jesus is indeed God's Son, the Beloved, with whom the Father is well pleased. And since this is who Jesus is, the disciples are to listen to him. It is no wonder that Peter, James, and John want to stay on the mountain a little longer—being warmed in the glow of the transfigured Lord, hearing about what he was talking over with Moses and Elijah, having the opportunity to listen to the very voice of God.

Who could have been more tempted to stay on the mountain than Jesus himself? He knew that each step down from that lofty peak meant another step taken toward the cross. You know he must have struggled mightily with the disciples' suggestion not to leave.

I like to think that having that special moment of experiencing God's majesty helped to make going down the mountain and back into ministry a little easier. The transfiguration event could not have come at a better time for the disciples, because in his gracious love, Jesus gives his closest followers a preview of what will happen to him following his death. Peter, James, and John get to catch a glimpse of the resurrected Christ who already has ascended into heaven. And as the passage from 2 Peter, our epistle lesson for this morning, interprets the event further, it also winds up being for the church a glimpse of Jesus' second coming in glory and majesty.

The transfiguration is Jesus' way of letting the disciples see for themselves ahead of time what he has been trying to teach them: that he is going to Jerusalem, where he will be tortured and killed but then raised on the third day. And we, in the church, look at this story each year immediately before we begin the season of Lent, the season in which we journey together with Jesus to cross. It is a way of reminding ourselves from the beginning of that journey that it ultimately does not end in death; it ends in eternal life in the kingdom

of God and authentic life while we remain on this side of the full realization of that kingdom on earth.

I particularly like it whenever Transfiguration Sunday takes place on the first Sunday of the month, the Sunday when we celebrate communion together. The means of grace we share at the table, then, particularly on Transfiguration Sunday, become *a way of allowing the majesty of God to be present in our ministry to God*. The real presence of God we acknowledge as we take the bread and the contents of the cup and consume them can be for us a mountaintop experience that inspires us not to become discouraged because our service to God often becomes mundane, routine, ordinary, even monotonous. As we join together to remember Jesus' last supper, majesty and ministry come together in a way that motivates us to continue to serve God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Majesty and ministry belong together, in fact, *they must go together*. Majesty without ministry makes what we do as the church irrelevant, while ministry without majesty makes what we do as the church irreverent. Let me repeat that. *Majesty without ministry makes what we do as the church irrelevant, because it can become strictly sacred. Ministry without majesty makes what we do as the church irreverent, because it can become strictly secular.*

I think this is a part of what seems to be in the mind of the writer of the epistle of 2 Peter. The purpose of 2 Peter is to combat heresy in the churches. There seems to have been some discouragement in these churches because of the apparent delay of Jesus' return.

False teachers, probably Gnostics, had seized upon this disappointment and were using it to urge the people to deny Christ. The author of 2 Peter's response is to remind his readers of the transfiguration of Jesus and to interpret that event as a preview of Christ's second coming, as we have said before. It was the writer's intent to interpret that experience in such a way as to assure the churches that Christ would indeed come again and that he deserved the honor and glory due to God's beloved Son.

So here is an example of majesty being brought to bear on a real ministry situation. The people in the churches to whom the letter was addressed had lost faith and hope, and the transfiguration event, in which the majesty of God in Christ was revealed, is utilized to give the people what they needed. This is the essence of ministry: providing the resources needed—be they physical, emotional, or spiritual—to help people cope with the difficulties of life.

Oftentimes what is most needed by people under stress and overcome by life's challenges is a glimpse of the majesty of God. To

offer to them at least a glimpse of the majesty of *God* is to offer them a view of what lies on the other side of whatever valley of the shadow of death they may be walking through.

This is what we attempt to do each week in worship. That is why it is so important to be in worship. Worshiping together as the community of faith allows us to go to the mountaintop with Jesus and become awed and amazed by the majesty of *God*. With such an experience, we can be freed from the discouragement we may have felt in the past week's effort at ministry and be energized and enlivened to charge once more into the fray of real human need.

So as we come to the table today, in anticipation of Lent, may our celebrating communion allow us to experience the majesty of *God*, not necessarily for its own sake alone, but for the inspiration we need to continue to serve *God*, no matter how mundane it becomes. May it be the "high" we need to combat all the "lows" we may feel when we minister to others as *God* has called us to do. May *God's* majesty continue to inspire our ministry, and may our ministry continue to be pleasing to *God*.