

Our son Jon and his family came down from Pennsylvania this weekend to help us get some prep done for our move in June. They arrived early enough that we went out Friday night to see the new movie *The Call of the Wild*. You know how it goes at the movies. You get inside and buy your bucket of popcorn and your bucket of soda and go into the movie theatre, to find a seat. So, you scramble over some poor person in the aisle seat and try not to step on toes or lose your balance. You finally get to your seat, get settled in and get ready to watch the movie. Soon the house lights dim; the speakers crackle, and an image appears on the screen. It is not the film you came to see. It is the preview of coming attractions, a brief glimpse of the highlights of a film opening soon. The moviemakers and theater owners hope the preview will pique your interest enough to make you want to come back and see the film.

On the Mount of the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John, the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, were given a preview of coming attractions. And today, on Transfiguration Sunday, we also are given a splendid preview of Jesus, radiant in divine glory, his mortal nature brilliantly though only momentarily transfigured; a dazzling preview of his divinity, undiminished and perfectly pure, shining in glory like the very sun. A sneak preview, a brief glimpse of what is in store for us when we come into the fullness of God's kingdom.

But like the preview in the movie theater, this is not the film that is showing today. It hasn't opened yet; it can't be seen in its entirety. Only a glimpse to arouse interest and stimulate curiosity. Those whose interest is piqued will have to wait for the full showing.

Peter, for one, thinks that's a crummy deal. This is the big picture he's been waiting to see. He's viewed enough of the melodramatic healings and documentaries featuring Jesus the teacher on the big screen. Peter is ready for the Imax version of it all. Peter's recent confrontation with Jesus over the master's depressing talk about rejection and suffering and dying is still fresh on his mind. His soul still stings from his Savior's words, "Get behind me, Satan, for you are not on the side of God but of mortals." Peter wants no more of that kind of talk, no more of that kind of picture. He wants action, big, bold, spectacular. Imax. Yes! This vision on the mountain, with Jesus, Moses and Elijah in celestial conversation, this is more like it. No: not *like* it; this *is it!* This is what he had hoped for ever since he dropped his nets and came alongside of Jesus.

What that moment must have been like is difficult to imagine. I look back to the OT reading with Moses on the mountain, covered in the cloud with his wingman, Joshua. Six days they are

enveloped in the cloud and on the seventh day, God called to Moses to come up higher. The appearance of the glory of the Lord to those down off the mountain was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain. Reminds me of some lyrics from the Marshall Tucker Band, “There’s fire on the mountain, lightnin’ in the air, gold in them hills and it’s waitin’ for me there.” In this scenario, however I might change a few words. “There’s fire on the mountain, lightnin’ in the air, God’s in them hills and He’s waitin’ for me there.” I can imagine that the Hebrews down off the mountain thought that Moses and Joshua were toast, consumed by the fire they were seeing. What fear that must have awakened!

We think we understand or can somehow imagine the glory of God as simply beautiful in the same way that we understand Him as little Jesus meek and mild. And we do so, I think, to our peril. No doubt, the glory of God is beautiful in many ways. Yet I also imagine with this fire on the mountain, that the glory of God is awesome to behold, powerful to experience and impossible to forget. Majestic Glory as Peter writes in his epistle. Strikingly beautiful beyond anything we’ve ever seen like majestic mountains or a brilliantly colored sunset. Powerful beyond our imagination so that the most powerful hurricane is as a shallow breath, the wildfires of the Amazon and Australia are but a lit match in comparison. Such is the dazzling brilliance and majesty of the glory of God that we so often never even consider and just take for granted.

Today is the day that makes us think twice about that. Today we are given, even if only in words, a glimpse of what Peter, James and John saw with their own eyes. Dazzlingly bright as it was, I’m guessing that even what they experienced was a toned-down version of the fullness of God’s glory.

What do we expect when we come to worship on Sundays? Do we expect to have revealed to us the beauty and majesty of God which causes awe and wonder and amazement as our response? Probably not. I’m guessing that we expect rather calm, subdued Episcopal worship that doesn’t have us leaving all riled up and ready to take on the world for Jesus. Maybe it’s time that we expect something else, something far beyond what we might ever consider taking part in.

The blinding light and the voice from the clouds challenge anyone’s faith that has turned tepid, perfunctory routine, and even jaded. How sad for us all. Let’s wake up and expect something beyond all this – something which only God can do.

I love this quote from her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard thus asks:

"Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are *like* children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets! Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews! For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us to where we can never return."

I can understand how some people read the transfiguration story and, as Dillard admits, "not believe a word of it." My prayer for us is that God will deliver us from the safe middle ground of self-serving, domesticating, faith taming, deistic piety and replace it with the fire of the Holy Spirit and that rushing, mighty wind that can bring a fresh breath of abundant life to us all.

Let's take a few moments to be quiet and allow the Spirit of God to speak to each of or give us our own private glimpse of His glory.

Silence

Sing a verse of Majesty

Majesty

Worship His majesty
Unto Jesus be all glory,
Honor and praise

So exalt, lift up on high
The name of Jesus
Magnify, come glorify
Christ Jesus the King

Majesty

Kingdom authority
Flow from His throne
Unto His own
His anthem raise

Majesty
Worship His majesty
Jesus who died, now glorified
King of all kings

Majesty

Worship His majesty
Unto Jesus be all glory,
Honor and praise

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