

CATCHING A GLIMPSE OF GOD'S GLORY

(2Kings 2: 1-12; Mark 9: 2-9)

One day, a long time ago, I heard a preacher preach a sermon on the transfiguration of Jesus entitled “*Catching a Glimpse of the Kingdom of God.*” I don’t so much remember the *words* she used in the sermon as much as I remember the *image* she left with me and the *vision* she cast in my spiritual imagination of *God’s kingdom* – something shining and bright; something washed and sparkling; something that takes my breath away like deep minty coolness does, and makes my soul delight like the inspired laughter of an infant does; something full of justice and righteousness, equality and peace, love and laughter; wonder and awe. Something that – every now and then – we catch a glimpse of on our own journey’s of life in some shape, form or fashion.

My soul looks back on those images as I approach the preaching task this week. As I put myself into the shoes of some of the scriptural characters that we have before us this morning – and as I invite you to

join me – we find ourselves with a golden opportunity to catch a glimpse of God’s glory.

II.

Through the story of Elijah and Elisha this morning, we are first able to catch a glimpse of the importance and inner-workings of the prophetic circles of ancient Israel. Elijah was considered the “big cheese” in certain circles of prophetic legitimacy, having already bested the prophets of the gods of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel with the awesomely unsurpassed power of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*1 Kings 18*). Elijah had recently anointed Elisha to be his prophetic protégé, which meant that Elijah was personally grooming Elisha to be the next-in-line as head of that particular prophetic cult.

No doubt that Elisha had seen Elijah do some miraculous things with the power and presence that God poured out through him. The scriptures don’t say much about the time that the two of them spent together aside from *1 Kings 19*, where Elijah takes that same cloak that

he covered his face with when God appeared before him as a “still, small voice,” as “sheer silence” (*1 Kings 19*) and wrapped it around Elisha; the same cloak that Elijah rolled up and struck the water of the Jordan River with as he and Elisha were on their final journey together, and the water parted to one side and to the other, and the two of them were able to cross on dry land, like Moses and the Hebrews did in Exodus. Talk about catching a glimpse of the glory of God! But Elisha hadn’t seen ANYTHING yet!

Elijah now invites Elisha to ask for anything he wants from Elijah before he is taken away, and Elisha asks for a WHOPPING helping of Elijah’s spirit. Elijah basically says it is not his to give (since Elijah knows that his spirit ultimately belongs to God), but says that if Elisha keeps his eyes open as Elijah is taken up, it will be done for him.

All of a sudden, God’s glory appears before them, coming between them, in the form of *chariots of fire*, being pulled by *horses of fire*! I don’t know if I could have kept my eyes open in the midst of all that

fire, but somehow Elisha did. He kept watching, and saw Elijah taken into the air, bound for heaven, traveling by the power of a whirlwind. Good God Almighty! What a sight that must have been! If THAT'S not "catching a glimpse of God's glory," then I don't know what is!

III.

But wait! We have MORE testimony of glimpsing God's glory from three of our favorite disciples: Peter, James and John. Peter – knick-named by Jesus as "The Rock" (maybe he had that eyebrow thing going like The Rock does today) – a rock that chose to "roll away" however when it came time to stand up for Jesus by the time the rooster crowed for the third time. James and John – so anxious to strike down with lightning those who disagreed with them, yet so short-sighted about what true greatness and servanthood means in God's kingdom.

No doubt the three of them had seen Jesus do many miraculous things by the power of God:

- They saw him heal Peter's mother-in-law;
- They helped him feed 5000 people with a handful of bread and fish;
- They watched him cast out demons;
- They saw him challenge the authorities in the temple;
- They saw what THEY were able to do through him;

All of those experiences were glimpses of God's glory for them, as they are also for us in our hearing and retelling of them. But just then, they saw something they had never seen before: Jesus was literally SHINING, right before their very eyes! Shining so brightly that I can imagine Peter, James and John having to cover their eyes because of the brightness! Shining so brightly that their minds could not fathom what was happening, and they had to experience it with their spirit! And THEN they saw what appeared to be Moses and Elijah – the same Moses that led the Hebrews through the wilderness and who the Lord

took up into heaven, and the same Elijah who was taken up in a whirlwind on the heels of a fiery entourage while Elisha looked on.

By this time Peter – “The Rock” – was out of his mind with awe and wonder, and just wanted to keep the miracle of the moment going, so HE offered to throw up some tents so everybody could be comfortable (no doubt while he tried to figure out how Moses and Elijah – who were supposed to be dead -- got thrown into their reality).

And THEN – as if ALL THAT wasn't enough glimpsing of God's glory for one day – they become covered in a thick, radiant cloud, from the midst of which comes a voice that says *“this is my son, marked by my love; you need to pay attention to what he says and does.”* And just as quickly as it all appeared, it all disappeared.

Good God Almighty! Talk about catching a glimpse of God's glory!

IV.

Just like Elisha, Peter, James and John today – if we but just keep our eyes and spirits open – we too can “catch a glimpse” of God’s glory all around us. Sometimes it charges before us like fiery horses drawing fiery chariots, or like a whirlwind that takes us – if even just for a moment – to another level of reality. And then sometimes it is like the sheer silence of the peace that passes all understanding. The Spirit of God finds a way to get our attention:

- ✚ It could be something in nature that reminds us that something beyond us is responsible for all that we see;
- ✚ It could be something that is shown to us as the cycle of birth, life and death plays itself out in our family;
- ✚ It could be healing for ourselves or others;
- ✚ It could be a deeper understanding of God’s grace or God’s gifts;
- ✚ It could be something tied to the love of someone else;
- ✚ It could be something that is discovered in solitude;

- ✚ It could be something celebrated in the communal theaters of culture and ritual;
- ✚ Or something uncovered in the depths of a painful conversation;
- ✚ It could be something seen, heard, felt, tasted or touched; something simple or complex; something far away or close by;
- ✚ Or it could just be something that is experienced in some ways that we have never experienced anything else before.

The stories of Elijah and his fiery chariots, and the transfiguration of Jesus, are stories that demonstrate some ways that God's glory, power and presence can break into our lives, on our level, and help us to see that God is never without resources. God's armies are always prepared for battle. God's power is always on standby. God's justice is always the agenda. God's mercy is always in the mix. God's love is always covering us. God's peace is always preparing the way of understanding.

These stories are also meant to make US bolder in our lives of witness to the power, justice, love and mercy of God's glory. As individuals, as

families, and as a faith community, we are called to not only CATCH a glimpse of God's glory, but also to SHARE a glimpse of God's glory!

✚ There are people whom we share space and place with in the world who need to know that there is a God who has power, peace, mercy and love for THEIR lives, lives that are so desperately in need of power, peace, mercy and love right now. They won't know that unless we share our glimpses of God's glory with them, and help them to glimpse God's glory too!

✚ There are those whom we are in relationship with in some shape, form or fashion whose days have been dark, whose visions of hope have been few and far between, and who can't see or feel the light of love in their lives. They need to know that there is a God who knows their name, who knows their circumstance, and whose glory can shine brightly enough to even lighten the deep darkness of their lives. They won't know that unless we share our

glimpses of God's glory with them, and help them to see glimpses of God's glory too!

✚ There are those in this community that surrounds us that wonders why we gather together week after week, year in and year out, singing and rejoicing, sharing our space with others, going forth in good will, who are wondering what we can do for THEM; what we can do with THEM; if we have anything here for THEIR lonely heart, or for THEIR sin-sick soul, or for THEIR empty spirit, or for THEIR eternal questions. They won't know unless we find a way to share our glimpses of God's glory with them, and help them to see glimpses of God's glory too!

Keep your eyes and your spirits open to God's possibilities. Keep your faith and your sense of wonder open and alive to Spirit sightings, where God's glory can be glimpsed. Keep your hand in the hand of the God who took the hand of Jesus and lifted him up from **death** so that we can know that all things are possible for us in **life**; because whether in

life or in **death** or in **life again**, we are constantly surrounded by the glory of God. Let us go forth in peace, and share that good news!

AMEN.

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