

Real Glory

Matthew 17:1-9 (February 23, 2020)

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Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Historical Context

Early readers of Matthew's gospel probably heard echoes of Exodus 24, enabling them to perceive Jesus as the "new Moses" who leads the people of God. They know that older story. Leaving Aaron behind along with the elders, Moses took Joshua with him into the mountain, where, after six days, the glory of the Lord burned on the mountain top and God spoke to Moses in that place, giving to him the words of the covenant with God's people (Exodus 24:13-18). Similar echoes of Moses' experience sound in the account of Elijah's mountaintop encounter with God (1 Kings 19:8ff). When Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus, these echoes from long ago resound in the ears of the disciples (and readers). Jesus and his followers are new players in the old, old story of God's encounters with God's people.

Theme: Real Glory

There are so very many people who beseech us insistently to see them as more glorious than they really are— Caesar and Herod, to name two in Jesus' own day – and in ours, movie stars galore: The whole culture of America has been about being The Best. Best in everything. Along comes Jesus, who never said he was anything more than an ordinary guy from Galilee. Who never wanted a palace, never wore silks, and never got his face engraved on any money.

He told his friends he could teach them about God and their own belovedness. For a text, he used the fish in their nets, the sheep in their fields, the seeds farmers sowed, and yeast in a woman's hands. And he added, a few blind men, a few lepers, a foreign woman with a sick child, quite a number of prostitutes and a woman who had five husbands.

One day, on a high mountain with two friends, he appeared to them to be shining in light. And they heard the voice of God calling him the Beloved. The thing is, he never asked them to see his glory. Instead he asked them to see his willingness to suffer, and his presence among the lowliest of them, as signs of the places to which God is drawn. The glory they saw in him was a thing he wanted to keep quiet about. Unlike Caesar, Herod, and many of today's "stars" who can't get enough of the glory road, Jesus says *hush* to Peter and the others, and, he says, let's go back down, to the low places in this world.