

Sermon: Lord of Glory

Exodus 19:16 – 20:3

Luke 9:28-36

Silvia Purdie, Milson Church

Friends, we are living in a de-sacralised world

That is a fancy academic word for the systematic denial of the sacred, the holy. It is part of the process of western society becoming more and more secular. God being pushed to the margins

Here's what it looks like in practice

our imaginations are being shaped by darkness rather than light

Our boys enjoy watching a programme called Face Off – anyone seen it? It's a fascinating reality TV show where the contestants are experts in making masks and costumes & face paint. Each week they have a challenge where they have to prepare complex moulds and masks and dress up a human model to look like a fantasy creature. Last week they had to do a Charlie & the Chocolate Factory creature incorporating lollies & sweets. You'd have thought they might have created something that looked inviting & delicious, a creature of joy and delight. Oh no. They created monsters, creatures of perversion and darkness, with lollies growing out of their skin, designed to entice children into traps, monsters of evil.

That's what is cool.

When you were young superheroes were the good guys. Yeah? And they still are in movies designed for young children, but for adults the superheroes are deeply ambiguous these days. Batman, spiderman, mutants, struggle with their own dark side, images are dark & violent.

When songs & movies speak of angels, light and beauty, these are almost always reserved for the object of our sexual desire.

So the outcome of all this – young people these days are far more likely to believe in ghosts and demons than they are to believe in God, Jesus, or the power of goodness.

This is what I mean by a desacralized world. Yes there is a wide acceptance of spiritual reality. But this is becoming increasingly a world without God, without light, without glory.

No wonder the illnesses of the soul are increasing despite all our miracles of medicine & medication.

This is the world we live in, the world in which we dare to believe in a God of love, a Jesus of power and majesty, a spirit of wonder, beauty.

We have been thinking about who Jesus is, and this morning we have a story that is probably quite familiar to you, the story of the Transfiguration. that's what it's called. And you've heard it before, heard sermons on this before.

yeah yeah so Jesus went up a mountain and glowed a bit.

What can we find to discover in this familiar ground?

It's like getting to a garage sale after it's been open for 3 hours, knowing that it's been well picked over already.

Could someone tell us again what happened ?

This is what we call a mountain top experience.

You'll have your own memories of 'mountain top experiences'. I hope you do!

Up there where the air is clear and the horizon drops away in the distance and the worries & hassles of everyday life hardly seem real. Up there, up the mountain, glory falls.

In this case, Jesus starts to glow

and there's the cloud and the voice of god in the cloud, and lo and behold Moses himself

And if you have long memories, as any good Jew does, you would remember that time when Israel camped at the foot of the mountain and Moses went up into the cloud and God spoke in the thunder and the glory of God was so present and so powerful that no one was allowed to go up lest they die

This is The central moment in which the identity of the Jewish people was forged. This moment of glory, with Moses literally with his head in the clouds, literally alight with the very presence of God, ears ringing with the very voice of God

And there in that moment of glory the people are formed through covenant. For Moses the covenant is in the form of 2 stone tables.

For Peter, James & John this moment of glory is such an intense experience that they find no words for it, no way to tell of it even to the other disciples. This moment of glory forges a new relationship with an old God, a new identity firmly grounded in the old.

This also is a covenant, a new covenant.
and it is based not on list of laws but on a person
The voice speaks not of judgment but of love
"This is my beloved son. Listen to him"
This new covenant is made not of stone but of a living relationship with
Jesus Christ.

This is part of the answer to who Jesus is.
This is Jesus, Lord of glory, Son of the living God who was and is and is to
come
the same Jahweh Jehovah who came in cloud and fire on Mt Sinai

OK, this all sounds great for a sermon, but where's the so what?
Are you actually willing in this day & age to believe in this thing I keep calling
glory?

Because, OK, reading back from 2013 it seems pretty obvious to us that
Moses was walking up an active volcano, with fire at the top and clouds of
smoke, thunder & quake. And Jesus, well it's quite normal to get surrounded
by cloud when you're up a mountain. And he was probably just caught in the
rays of the setting sun, right?
As for Moses & Elijah showing up, well the disciples even own up to being
half asleep at the time, they must have dreamt it!

Because this is how our de-sacralised world thinks. We have no room for
awe and wonder. We're too cynical for that, right?

Your turn now. Could I ask you please to tell the person sitting next to you
what you think about the idea of divine glory,
Have you ever seen it or felt it? What have you experienced that comes
close? Or are you dubious about the whole idea?

...

I was brought up in a family in which faith was lived with your feet firmly
planted on the ground. For my parents, and their parents, the Christian
gospel was a way to live, a commitment to caring for people, doing your
best, making a difference in the world. And so it is. But as a young adult I
found my heart restless for more than this. I saw my friends drift away from
church, and my sister & my mother. But somehow I did not. Something
utterly compelling about the Christian faith kept me searching for something
more than living a decent life, being good.

I look back on those years with enormous gratitude. God brought me people and places that gradually showed me more and more of who he is. One thing which was enormously important was learning to be still, to wait on God, to calm the inner buzz, to allow silence. Who is teaching young people to do that these days in a world of headphones and ipods and cell phones and constant connectedness to a million voices?

I knew the glory of God sitting with a thousand other young people in a place called Taize in France, candlelit worship, simple repetitive songs in various languages. At the centre of each worship was 10 minutes of silent prayer. That's a long time, but for me immensely rich. Jesus was present with me in visions, in an abiding sense of holy presence. There in that place I knew a call to ordained ministry ... remind me to tell you more about that sometime.

I have been blessed with many other ways and times of glimpsing the glory of God. Some of the most precious have been very personal, words spoken through others, glory in creation and friendship.

The thing about us human beings is that we like to pin things down. We like to name things, understand things. And sometimes God has to remind us that he's bigger than us! And more amazing than we will ever understand. Us humans, we like to get things done – well I do anyway. We like to feel as tho we're making progress, making things better. And there's lots of wonderful big ideas in the Christian faith about transformation and mission and loving care for others and practical help and growing the church and sharing the gospel and and and ... always plenty to DO! And sometimes God has to remind us that he's bigger than what we can achieve, even with his help ... That's the crazy thing about moments of experiencing glory – they don't achieve anything! They're just wonderful. They're just a touch from God. That's it. It's not FOR anything. Jesus loves us not for what we do, but just because he does!

If you have asked for the Holy Spirit to come into your life then God will come close to you. If you rest in moments of quiet, if you come with open heart to worship, then Jesus will be with you through his Spirit. If you desire him, expect him to find ways to let you know personally how precious you are to him.

And so, God gives us moments when our own faces almost glow when our hearts blaze, just even for a minute, with something that is hard to name
something that might feel warm and loving

or strange even fearful
might feel energizing, inspiring
or quietly deeply still

Glory is a crack between earth and heaven.
Jesus is the one who opens it. Jesus, beloved son of the living God, Jesus
died and risen who pours out his presence in his Spirit, this Jesus is Lord of
Glory.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of heaven and earth
the whole earth is full of your glory
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna in the highest.

God's Grandeur

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.