

The promise of glory * Mark 9:1-11

March 5, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

A few years back, Julie and I decided to do a 5K run together in Hamilton. Now, when I say that we were going to do a 5K run together, I don't actually mean that we would RUN together; I learned a long time ago is that I really just need to say 'You go on ahead and I'll see you at the finish line.' 😊

So the day came and it was a nice, sunny day; a little on the hot side, but a nice day for a run. The race began, Julie took off to the front of the pack and I settled in at my nice gentle pace. About 50m into the race, I realized 'oh this is nice, the first km was almost all downhill – a nice gentle slope to start the race off. This is great.' And then about ten steps later, I realized 'wait, if I'm running a kilometre downhill at the beginning of the race, then I'm going to have to run uphill a kilometer when all I'll want to do is collapse.' .

Fast forward 15 minutes or so and I got to the point where I had to start climbing up towards the end of the finish line again. And all of a sudden that nice gentle slope didn't look like a gentle incline anymore. It seemed like a very steep climb to the top.

But at the very top of the hill, they had this big yellow inflatable archway to mark out the finish line and seeing that gave me the boost of energy that I desperately needed. It was like seeing the end and being able to anticipate that gave me energy for what was ahead. Every step of the way, my eyes were on that big yellow archway, and it pulled me forward to the end.

Now, why do I tell you this story? I tell you this story because it captures the spirit of the passage that we are going to look at today – Mark 9. And I think it asks us to consider 'what are you looking forward to in life?' And I don't just mean: what's on your calendar that excites you? What I mean is: what motivates you to press on when things get rough and what empowers you to keep going when all you want to do is stop? Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 9 and we'll think about those questions together. Mark chapter 9.

Mark chapter 9 verse 2 starts like this:

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.

'After six days' Jesus did this – what happened six days ago? Well, just like us, six days ago, Jesus and the disciples had talked about His upcoming death and resurrection. Remember, at the end of Mark 8, Jesus says 'I'm going to suffer and die and rise again.' And then He breaks it to the disciples that if they are going to stick with Him, it means that they need to deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Him. That conversation happened six days before and so it's fresh on their minds when Jesus called Peter, James and John to join Him on the mountain.

And what they saw there was one of the most mysterious and awe-inspiring moments in Jesus' life.

Mark says 9:2 Jesus took them up the mountain where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.

The language is literally 'transformed' here. Jesus' very nature seems to have changed from His earthly appearance to His heavenly one. Practically speaking, I think it's like Jesus pulled back the curtain on His humanity to reveal to Peter and James and John to the full glory of His divinity, revealing who He really is. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

Just imagine this scene – Peter and James and John follow Jesus up the mountain. They've known Him for the last three years now; sure He's the Messiah, but really, He's just one of the guys. They ate together, worked together, walked together through the mud, and all of a sudden, Jesus is shining with all the radiance of a thousand suns. He is transformed to reveal the fullness of His glory. This is one of those 'aha, what?, wow!' moments.

And as if that wasn't enough, verse 4, And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Moses was there as the representative of the Law, Elijah was there as the representative of the Prophets. And according to the OT, when it was time for the Messiah to come, both Moses and Elijah would appear. And here they are now on this mountain and they're essentially handing Jesus the baton and saying 'You take it from here in God's plan of redemption.'

What would you say if you were there, like Peter and James and John? They're absolutely gobsmacked!

5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (There are lots of guesses why he suggested doing that but I think verse 6 explains it).

6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) It was just the first thing that came to mind.

Just a quick side story here – when I was in university, I got to help load in some of the bands that were playing on campus at Laurier. Big Sugar, I helped them load in; the Tea Party, I helped them too. They're pretty famous for Canadian bands and at the time I thought the Tea Party was really cool. And so one of the things that I was doing to help was to set up the water cooler for their dressing room.

You know the big jugs like we have in the back? There's this cap on the bottom you gotta pull off? It would not come loose and so I was really yanking on it. And all of a sudden it let go and whump! I hit myself right in the nose.

And at that very moment, the door behind me opened and guess who stepped out? The lead singer of the Tea Party. And all I could think to say was 'I just punched myself in the nose.'

That's Peter. He is so overwhelmed by this vision of Jesus' glory that he just doesn't know what to say.

Then, verse 7, Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

There's something neat here in connection with Moses and Elijah – when Moses went up to get the ten commandments, he went up on a mountain to meet with God (Exodus 24:15). And when Elijah was exhausted and ready to give up, he went up on a mountain and met with God (1 Kings 19:11). And now here, here's Jesus and His disciples up on the mountain and meet with God. And what does He say:

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

It's like God is saying to the disciples: 'I know He's your buddy, I know He's your friend, but He's not just that. He is my beloved Son sent to accomplish the crucial mission that I have given Him. He must suffer and be killed and rise again for the forgiveness of sins, so listen to Him. When He says 'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me (which is fresh on their minds), it's in your best interest to listen to Him.'

And then verse 8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As soon as it had begun, it was over, and Peter, James and John were left with this unforgettable experience of Jesus' glory.

In keeping with His desire to not let people know that He was the Messiah until it was clear what kind of Messiah He was, verse 9 –

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

If you were Peter, what's your first instinct going to be when you get down the mountain? 'Guys you are never going to believe what we just saw! Jesus was glowing like the midday sun and Moses and Elijah were there and I think this means that Jesus' kingdom is about to come in force!' It's a good thing that cell phones didn't exist because all three of these guys would have been filming it and putting it on YouTube!

But that's not what Jesus wanted. He didn't want people getting the wrong idea. Yes, there was glory on the way. And yes, the true nature of Jesus was beyond majestic. But in Jesus' kingdom, the way to glory is through suffering. He needed to suffer and die to restore us to

God, before He could reveal how glorious He was. He needed to die on the Cross before what He went on to glory because what He did on the Cross would enable us to share in that glory. And so Jesus says: "not a word of this until I've died and risen again." 10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what [exactly Jesus meant by 'rising from the dead'] (lit. "...rising from the dead" meant). (Mar 9:10 NIV).

Let's stop here and talk about the Transfiguration, because it's one of the most unique events in Jesus' life. It's glorious but it's mysterious too, so unlike anything else that took place in Jesus' life. It begs the question: why? Why does this happen? Why does Jesus take His disciples up on the mountain and reveal His glory to them, only to hide it again and lay down His life on the Cross?

I read something years ago that always stuck with me. I have this little devotional book called 'Awakening Faith.' It's like 'Our Daily Bread' if 'Our Daily Bread' was written by the early Church fathers and one – Leo the Great (ca 400's) – said this.

"The great reason for this transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of his disciples and to prevent the humiliation of his passion from disrupting the faith of those who witnessed it."ⁱ

Just think about what lies ahead for Jesus and the disciples. We know what's going to happen – they are going to face incredible hardships, and they do it with this vision of the glorified Jesus in the back of their minds. Just imagine though that it never happened.

Sure, Peter and James and John and the other disciples had seen Jesus' miracles and sure they knew there was something special about Him, but give it a couple of weeks and He's going to be hanging on a cross. And we're so used to the idea of a cross that we hardly blink. But to the disciples, the Cross is as shameful as it gets.

Believe it or not, people in the ancient world had a hierarchy when it came to executions. If you were rich or well-known, they'd lop your head off, nice and quick. The Cross though, that was reserved for the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low. Traitors to the nation and the worst of criminals. And what's more, you've got the OT teaching that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed by God (Galatians 3:13 from Deuteronomy 21:23).

The disciples were going to see unfold in the weeks ahead and they very well might have lost their nerve and lost their faith if they didn't have something to back it up, some clear revelation of Jesus' glory. But they did. They had the Transfiguration. And the Transfiguration left a mark on them that would never fade. Peter would later write in 2 Peter 2:16-18:

16 ... We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”

Having seen the glory of Jesus, they were prepared to stick with Him and follow Him, no matter where their faith would lead them.

So that’s why I think the Transfiguration happened for the disciples; what about us? Well, Leo the Great gave us an answer to that question too and I think it’s related to the first answer.

“The [first] reason for this transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of his disciples and to prevent the humiliation of his passion from disrupting the faith of those who witnessed it.”ⁱⁱ

“A second reason is to allow the whole body of Christ to understand the kind of transformation that it would receive as his gift. The members of the church look forward to a share in that glory.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I think he’s right. I think that the Transfiguration happened to give us a foretaste of the glory that we have to look forward to, to empower us as we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.

Last week, you might very well have asked ‘ok, why I should I give up my life and deny myself and take up my Cross?’ I kind of gestured in the direction of an answer – well because Jesus says that if you lose your life for Him you’re going to save it – but here’s your real answer. Glory. Glory beyond any glory the world has ever seen or could even imagine.

The Transfiguration shows us the unsurpassed glory of Jesus as a foretaste of the glory that we will experience when we live forever with Him.

And not only that, this glory is revealed to us to equip us to deal with the suffering that comes our way as we follow Jesus with our lives.

In the flow of Jesus’ story, the disciples were about to go through the most brutal, disappointing, heartbreaking period of their lives. They were soon to see Jesus betrayed by one of their own, they were going to see Jesus die on a Cross, they were going to see their lives in danger because they had identified with Him. They were going to struggle; they were going to suffer. If they were doing this without warning and with no promise of a rewards they might very well have said ‘forget this’ and took off with a one way ticket to Nineveh.

But because of the Transfiguration, they had a foretaste of the glory that awaited them if they stood firm in their commitment to Jesus. They understood that they would share in this glory, if they kept on to the end. Just like that big yellow finish line pulled me up the hill, the glory of the transfiguration is meant to draw us forward, no matter what lies ahead.

Let me put it to you like this:

The promise of glory is given to carry you through suffering. That's your take-home for today.

The promise of glory implicit in the Transfiguration is given to carry you through suffering.

Jesus knows that life as His disciple is not going to be an easy ride.^{iv} To deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Jesus instead of your own heart; that's not easy to do. On top of that, there are people who will oppose you for following Jesus. And on top of that, on top of that, there are the natural things that we deal with as human beings. Illness, aging, conflict. Jesus does not promise us a rose garden when we sign up to follow Him.

He does though promise us glory. In the Transfiguration, in the resurrection, in the picture of Heaven that we see in Revelation, He shows us the kind of unsurpassed perfection that we are going to experience at the end of the age. That gives us something great to look forward to as we follow Him through thick and thin. The glory of Jesus revealed in the Transfiguration is the glory that you yourself will experience when you've run the race and He says to you 'Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into my rest forever.'

So let the promise of glory carry you through suffering. Knowing that you will shine with the light of a thousand suns, knowing that you will live in a body that is free from sin and sorrow and decay, keep on pressing on as a follower of Jesus. Don't let hardships trip you up; don't give up and go back to living for yourself. Instead, '...throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles ... [die to self and] run with perseverance the race marked out for you.' That's what Hebrews 12:1 says. And 12:2 actually goes on to tell us that the promise of glory carried Jesus through HIS suffering too!

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The promise of glory carried Jesus through suffering as He suffered to make a way for us to experience eternal glory. Let that carry you through whatever lies ahead.

I know that many of you are suffering; many of you in different ways. Your body is failing you, it hurts to get around. Somebody has hurt you or broken a relationship with you. People might oppose you as a follower of Jesus. Glory is coming and the God of glory is with you now. Let it carry you through what lies ahead.

Let the promise of glory carry you through suffering.

BENEDICTION

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

(Col 3:1-4 NIV).

NIV 2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2Co 4:17 NIV).

ⁱ Leo the Great, 'The Transfiguration is our victory,' in James Stuart Bell. *Awakening Faith: Daily Devotions from the Early Church*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Reading 2.

ⁱⁱ Leo the Great, reading 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leo the Great, reading 2.

^{iv} "Our risen Christ wants to encourage us. He has called us to confess him as Christ, and that involves confessing him as a suffering Messiah. It involves also embracing the suffering which comes from the Cross, the suffering which comes from being like him, from living his ethics in a fallen world, from speaking his name when it brings reproach. We must make this our own if we are to follow him" (R. Kent Hughes, "The Midnight Son," *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Saviour* (Preaching the Word commentary), Chp. 1 Mark 9:2-13. Olive Tree).