

+ Exodus 24:12,15-18 + It's the Same Glory +
+ Last Sunday after the Epiphany: The Transfiguration of Our Lord + 2 March 2014 +

Think back to when you were a child. You wake up in the middle of the night. It's completely dark in your room, except for maybe a little night light. You just had a nightmare and you're terrified. You don't know if something's going to jump out of your closet or out from under your bed. So you start yelling, "Mom!! Dad!! Help!! I'm scared!!" You hear movement down the hall as mom or dad sleepily stumbles into your room and sits on your bed. They wipe the tear from your cheek as you try to explain through the sniffles why you're so scared. They give you a big hug, send you to the bathroom, and when you come back, they tuck you back into bed for the night. "I love you, but you don't have to be scared. It was just a dream." You go back to sleep so happy that your mom or dad could comfort you when you were scared.

Think back again to when you were a child. Your parents have told you not to throw your ball in the living room. In spite of their best efforts to childproof your home, there are still a few fragile things on high shelves and they don't want them broken. Of course, you were half-listening when they told you not to throw the ball around—distracted by whatever play plans you were devising in your head. Later in the day, you find yourself again playing with your ball in the living room. It bounces off the ceiling so quickly when you throw it up there, but then the ball hits the ceiling at a weird angle and like a guided missile, crashes right into that old vase from Great-Grandma Hilda. You think, "Oh, I didn't see that there", just as it shatters into a hundred bits and pieces. You start to wonder how you could cover up the mess without mom and dad noticing when you suddenly hear them walk in the door. You dive behind a chair, but you know what's coming. Fear and dread and guilt fill your mind because you know that there will be consequences.

Two different situations, yet the same parents. In one instance, you're thankful to see them. In the other, you dread even being in their presence. Your parents were the same people in both cases, yet because of your desperate need with the nightmare or because of your guilt over breaking that vase, you saw them in two completely different ways.

The same could be said about the glory of the Lord. The Israelites saw the glory of the Lord blazing on Mt. Sinai. Peter, James, and John saw the same glory of the Lord blazing around Jesus. In both cases, they were terrified. Was God really coming to judge them...or was he there to comfort them?

Put yourself in the sandals of the Old Testament Israelites. The almighty God had rescued them from centuries of slavery in Egypt. With terrifying plagues and jaw-dropping miracles, the Lord had humbled the mighty empire of Egypt and delivered his people. They had every reason to rejoice in the presence of their God of free and faithful grace.

...But there was a problem. This same gracious God is also a holy God. He had his servant Moses bring the people to Mt. Sinai so he could give them his holy Law and establish his covenant with them as his chosen people. God had specific instructions for his people. They were not allowed to touch the mountain on which he would descend or they would be put to death because no one corrupted by sin can stand in the presence of the holy God. Not even a stray animal would survive. Moses recounts what happened when the Lord arrived. ***"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled...Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder."*** (Exodus 19:16-19) What a sight that would've put fear into the bravest heart! That billowing cloud hovered over the mountain. ***"To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain."*** God's glory looked like it was consuming the top of the mountain. It looked like it could destroy someone in an instant.

Naturally, everyone was terrified. The sight of God's glory reminded the people how much they deserved God's wrath and condemnation. They were reminded of their guilt and the death that every single one of them deserved. They were reminded of God's coming judgment. In a sense, the Israelites were catching a glimpse of the glory that God would reveal in full on the Last Day when he would come to judge the living and the dead. The people were so frightened that they begged Moses to speak on their behalf because they could not bear facing the holy God. God's glory was too real.

The Lord provided a solution. He told Moses, ***"Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."*** So Moses

went up the mountain and seemed to disappear in the cloud and glory of the Lord. Some wondered if Moses would ever come back alive, but in his grace the Lord preserved him as he gave Moses his Law for his people.

When does God make you tremble? None of us have seen the glory of the Lord like the Israelites did. None of us have had such a terrifying glimpse of God's glory, but does the Lord in his holiness ever make you tremble? That holy, moral Law that Moses brought down from the Lord—those 10 commandments that still apply to us today—they're like a mirror of God's holy glory. You look at them and what you see is terrifying.

Have you always respected, loved, and trusted in God with all your mind, all your heart, and all your strength? Have you always given him your highest priority? Have you called on God's holy name with all your heart or have you used his saving name in ways it was not intended? Have you neglected or despised or refused to be edified by the preaching of his holy Word? Have you been disobedient or disrespectful to your parents or others in authority? Have you not loved your neighbor as yourself or faithfully carried out the callings God has given you? Have you always defended your neighbor or spoke well of them? Have you always had pure and clean thoughts? Perhaps you've been greedy, lustful, envious, proud, lazy, lacked self-control or allowed your temper to get the best of you. You've sinned publicly and privately. You have fallen short of God's holy will and deserve his judgment.

When you and I realize that after a long, painful look at God's holy Law, we tremble. We are left without excuse and fear the consuming glory of God's holy judgment that could come at any time on any day to us and the rest of the world. You realize that there is no possible way you could make up for any of your guilt or could live a life so perfect that God would have to let you into heaven. You realize how desperately you need a Savior.

We leap ahead 1,500 years and three disciples—Peter, James, and John—follow their Teacher, their Master Jesus ***“up a high mountain by themselves”***. Suddenly Jesus is ***“transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun, and his clothes become as white as the light.”*** (Matthew 17:1-2) The disciples fall to the ground in fear, but then they notice Moses and Elijah actually standing there next to their Lord—the same Moses whom God preserved within his glory on the mountain and the prophet Elijah through whom the Lord revealed his glory to unbelieving Israel. The prophets stand there speaking with Jesus and discussing what was about to happen—the greatest revelation of God's glory of all—the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The disciples realize they are in the presence of the glorious and holy God, yet he doesn't strike them dead. In fact, his glory envelopes them and God himself tells these terrified disciples, ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”*** (Matthew 17:5) The holy God was publicly giving his approval to Jesus so they would know who he was and why he had come—not to judge and condemn, but to save and set free. The glory of the Lord became all the more comforting when the disciples heard the voice of Jesus, ***“Don't be afraid”*** (Matthew 17:7), and once again saw just Jesus, their Teacher, their Savior—the same Jesus, the same God, the same glory. After his payment for sin on the cross and his glorious resurrection from the dead, the disciples would find comfort in this revelation of the glory of the Lord as they realized that the God who had terrified them had also rescued them.

This God, this Jesus, who appears in terrifying glory in his holy Law, is the same God, the same Jesus who comforts you with the knowledge that he became your substitute, that he lived the perfect life in your place that you could not. This glorious Lord and Savior cares for you removing your fears with the comfort of his presence in Word and Sacrament, with the cleansing of his forgiveness for every single one of your sins, with the peace that alone can calm your anxiety and worries and nervous fears, with the joy that dries your tears of sorrow and grief and pain.

This Jesus is glorious in his grace, and he changes you and me to see him in that glory in a completely different way. Yes, when we sin, his glory is terrifying and shows us how desperately we need a Savior, but yet in his grace, in his undeserved love, he demonstrates that he is our Savior from sin, from death, from the power of the devil and the sinful world. He proves that the One who is powerful to destroy is the One who is powerful to save even you and me. He's the same God with the same glory.

Our God doesn't change. In fact, today we go down that mountain of glory with our Savior and follow him through the season of Lent to a mount of greater glory—a mount where our God, our Savior will allow himself to be despised, to be rejected, to be crucified and killed. Yet there the Lord of glory will reveal the greater glory of his love and mercy and grace as he sacrifices himself for your sins and mine. That greater glory will reveal itself in an empty tomb, in death conquered, and in heaven opened. Someday we who deserve the Lord's glorious judgment will see his glorious grace with our own eyes in the glories of heaven. We'll see the same God, the same Savior, the same glory—and glorious comfort will be ours forever. Amen.