

TEXT: Exodus 24: 12-18  
Matthew 17: 1-9

### “Glimpses of Glory”

In his movie *History of the World, Part I*, Mel Brooks depicts a famous scene from the Bible. Moses is coming down from the mountain with three stone tablets in his hands. He boldly announces:

*“Here, O Israel, are the fifteen...”*

He trips.

One of the tablets falls to the ground  
and shatters into pieces.

He continues:

*“Oops! The Ten Commandments!”*

We may chuckle, even laugh. I like a good joke as much as the next guy. I even think it’s a good idea once and awhile to poke fun at our most cherished religious traditions and stories. And yet, I wonder if we understand the glory of God. This aspect of the story is easily overlooked.

In the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Exodus*, when Moses first goes up on the mountain to receive the commandments of God, the text says:

***“The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai,  
the cloud covered it for six days;  
on the seventh day he called Moses out of the cloud.  
Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord  
was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain  
in the sight of the people of Israel.”***  
(Exodus 24: 16-17)

What is the glory of God? This question is prompted, not only by the story from *Exodus*, but by the incident in the gospels known as the Transfiguration of Jesus. We celebrate this event every year on the Sunday before the beginning of Lent. In this episode from the life of Jesus, Jesus and the three of the disciples go to the top of a mountain. While they are there, Jesus is “*transfigured*”: his face and clothes became dazzling white. Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah, two dearly departed heroes of the Old Testament. Needless to say, the disciples are awestruck. Peter wants to build “*booths*” there to commemorate the event, but then they were overtaken by a cloud and became terrified.

A voice spoke out of the cloud:

***“This is my Son, the Beloved;  
with him I am well pleased;  
listen to him!”*** (Matthew 17: 5)

Then they were alone and Jesus led them back down the mountain.

In both of these incidents, the Transfiguration and the Giving of the Ten Commandments, a common thread is the glory of God. What is the glory of God? Simply put: It is the presence of God. In both of these events, God’s presence was seen in the physical transformation of reality. The people of Israel

saw Moses standing in a cloud of fire up on the mountain. Later on, the Israelites saw the face of Moses glow. The disciples saw Jesus become dazzling white as he talked with Moses and Elijah. God was present in an extraordinary way in the lives of Moses and Jesus. It could be seen in their physical appearance.

Why should we care about the glory of God? What impact does it have on our lives right now? I daresay most of us have not had an extraordinary experience of God like those described today, although most of us have sensed the presence of God in some other way, perhaps in a spectacular sunset or breathtaking mountain vista. In one way or another, all of us have had a sense of God's presence in our lives. If not, we wouldn't be here today. Furthermore, even the most mature Christians are always seeking deeper and more profound experiences of God. Dramatic Biblical reports of the glory of God guide our own quests for more experiences of God. What can we learn from the burning cloud, or Jesus' dazzling white clothes?

The first point is obvious: Experiences of the glory of God are but glimpses.

We may wish for more, but as the Transfiguration makes clear, the glory of God is fleeting. As soon as the experience is over, Jesus leads the disciples back down the mountain. Jesus is like a policeman after an accident. *"Move along. There's nothing more to see here."*

And yet, something did happen. If you have ever been a witnesses to an appearance of God, I am sure you still remember it, but it is over, Gone, but not forgotten. This is how God is: The glory of God comes in glimpses.

This may seem discouraging because we want experiences of God to linger forever. We are like Peter at the Transfiguration who wanted to commemorate the event by building some tents. These man-made shelters would allow him to stay there and enjoy the glory of God forever. But Jesus said, *"Move along."*

If you think about it, this makes sense. The glory of God would get boring. Who really wants to sit on the shore of a beautiful lake looking a beautiful sunset forever? If I had enough money I would build a house with a spectacular view of the mountains. It might be nice for a awhile, but eventually it would become boring. I would anxious to get off the front porch and see what's up on the mountain or down in the valley.

God gives us only glimpses of his glory because otherwise we would become stuck in only one place looking at God. It would become boring, and the last thing God wants is boring believers. Instead, God wants us to go out into the world empowered to serve others by our experiences of God. As we go into the world, we will have even more experiences of God, but we will not be bored! God is calling upon us to serve God in the world, not stare at images of God's glory in temples!

One of the 10 commandments that Moses brought down the mountain is the ban on "graven images" or idols. The reason for this is that God knows that we would spend too much time looking at the idols and not enough time serving God in the world. I have always been amused by people who want to post copies of the 10 commandments in schools and even courthouses. Don't they understand this is a violation of the commandment against graven images? God does not want us to worship the 10 commandments; God wants us to go out into the world and obey the commandments!

Let us pray.

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom  
and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are God's judgements  
and how inscrutable God's ways!  
For from God  
and through God  
and to God are all things.  
To God be glory forever."  
AMEN