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Luke 9:28-36
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WHAT DOES GLORY LOOK LIKE?

It's has been quite a week. The images fixed in my mind are of this lovely city on the Dneiper River, (Nee-per), Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. It's our Washington, DC. There's St. Michael's Monastery, Saint Sophia Cathedral, government buildings that are a mixture of the old and the new, neighborhoods, a city that is home to almost 3 million people. I see images of cars on the highways as people leave that city, their home, and mothers and fathers carrying their children into underground subway stations. Then I think of the images I have seen of war-torn cities, and I pray that this will not become one of them.

We are always trying to make sense of the world, but there are seasons when it seems like the world is disproportionately out of whack. Just as we receive the news that Maryland has been declared a green state by the CDC, meaning that COVID cases are low and the spread is low, there's another world situation which has run amok, and laid heavy on our hearts.

The Rev. Dr. Janet Hunt writes about our constant struggle to make sense of the world. Sometimes we wonder, "Why even try?" But we do try and that's a good thing. There's a COA group that meets on Wednesdays called Faith and News. They welcome outsiders like me. I can't always attend, but I try because that group discusses current events in the light of our faith. The world's problems don't get solved in that hour on Wednesday afternoons, but that group helps me make sense of the world, and reassures me that God is in the midst of it all.

Rev, Dr. Hunt writes about a time when it had been quite a week in her life. In a moment of wanting answers from anywhere, she reached for her phone and asked, "Siri, what exactly is the meaning of life?"

To her surprise, Siri had several answers:

"Life's meaning is a force that underlies the quality of living things."

"All evidence suggests that the meaning of life is found in chocolate."

"The meaning of life is found in being nice to people, avoiding fat in your diet, reading a good book every now and then, making sure to take walks and living together in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations."

And then Siri added: "I find it odd that you would ask something inanimate about the meaning of life."

Jesus' disciples did not have access to Siri or a constant newsfeed, but they knew a world that often seemed disproportionately out of whack. They were challenged every day to maintain

meaning and purpose in light of Jesus' calling that completely upended their lives. Wasn't Jesus the one who was supposed to come and bring healing and justice and restore Israel to its rightful place in the world? Wasn't there going to be some glory and recognition for them in this work that so dramatically changed their lives? Isn't that what glory is- recognition and accolades??? The followers of Jesus were always trying to make sense of what Jesus was doing in the world.

Just before, Peter, James and John take this hike up the mountain with Jesus, he tells them that he will suffer, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and that he will be killed. Now how do you make sense of that?

Jesus foretells his death to his followers, and for them, this is not to be the path of the Messiah. If there had been duct tape, they would have wanted to put that over Jesus' mouth. I am sure they were looking at Jesus wondering, "Are you dehydrated?"

So, perhaps when Jesus took Peter, James, and John on that hike up the mountain, they might have thought some time with nature and fresh air, and a lovely landscape would be good for Jesus. Perhaps some prayer time together would bring Jesus out of this dark mood that didn't make any sense.

But.....they are obviously not on that mountaintop to enjoy the beautiful vistas.

This transfiguration story is a strange one. There's this dazzling light, Moses and Elijah appear. Peter plans a construction project to keep them together on this mountain, but then there's this cloud and a voice, and the disciples are terrified.

They can't make sense of what is happening..... until many years later after Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples had to continue the ministry on earth. It was only upon reflection, doing the hard work that Jesus had done, and lots of time that the disciples began to understand what they were shown and instructed to do on the mountaintop that day.

In the Second Letter of Peter in the New Testament, most likely written by one of Peter's followers we hear the experience of the transfiguration being remembered and recalled. Eugene Peterson has written a contemporary paraphrase of the Bible called The Message, and this is his take on those verses in the Letter of 2 Peter:

"We couldn't be more sure, we now know what we saw and heard that day with Jesus on the mountain. It was God's glory manifested in Jesus, in this dazzling light. There he was with Moses and Elijah, representing God's salvations history. And God's voice spoke. The prophetic word for who holds the future was spoken to us that day on the mountain and we were told to listen to Jesus and take all our guidance from him.

We will do well to always keep focusing on that, to continue to listen to Jesus. For Jesus was dazzling. Jesus is the light, and we are to spread that light. God holds the future and in the darkest time, we can wait for daybreak and the rising of the morning star. It will come!"

Glory is God's illumination, and yes, it is seen in beautiful sunsets and landscapes, and joyful gatherings of friends and loved ones. But there is also the glory of the cross, the glory of sacrifice, the glory of speaking truth to power knowing that there will be consequences, the glory of insisting on what is right when wrong seems to rule the day. Glory is God's illumination and it brings us close to God's intentions and closer to making sense of what God is able to do in the most impossible and confusing circumstances.

There was a movie back in 1989 entitled "Glory." It's a powerful story about the 54th Massachusetts infantry, one of the Union Army's African American regiments in the American Civil War. These African American regiments were denied many privileges and amenities. Yet, when they were given an out and an opportunity to leave the battles, they stayed together, not wanting to fracture the brotherhood that had formed. If you are seeking beautiful sunsets, you won't see those in this movie nor will you see "happily ever after." You will see the glory of courage, resilience, and sacrifice. You will see "glory" that ray of light in the darkness, that promises that no matter what it is **God who owns the future.**

One of the most contemporary images of glory was given to us in the song written for the 2014 movie, "Selma," John Legend comes in throughout the song with the long, hope-filled view that "One day glory will come, and it will be ours." It will be fulfilled, God's complete revelation. In the light of redemption, things will make sense.

Then the rapper, Common, comes in between this refrain that Legend is singing, naming all that's taking place now, manifesting God's presence and work in our everyday world, giving us glimpses of God's glory. The song is a masterful work about what is now and what is still to come.

Frederich Buechner writes:

To behold God's glory, to sense God's style is the closest we can be to God this side of paradise. **Glory is what God looks like, sounds like**, so for the time being let's keep our eyes and our ears open for where we see God. Glory is to God what style is to an artist. A painting by Vermeer, a rap song by Common, an aria by Mozart, an African American spiritual- each is so rich with the style of the one who made it, that it couldn't have been made by anyone else and its impact on the world is staggering.

The heavens are telling the glory of God. Glory is the outward manifestation of God's holy handiwork in the world.

As we begin this season of Lent, what mountain is Jesus leading you to climb? What territory in this season are you being asked to travel and traverse? Follow Jesus up your Lenten Mountain

just as you are. Be truthful about that. Maybe you are bearing the weight of confusion and anxiety. Maybe you are worried about your children or a diagnosis or some news you have just received. Maybe you have family in Ukraine. Maybe there is a relationship that's very difficult.

Maybe grief is visiting your heart, Maybe, it's just that the world is out of whack. What mountain is Jesus leading you to climb?

Moses had to climb a mountain and was his world ever out of whack. He is trying to get these people through the wilderness. He is going to bring them the best gift ever, the law given to them by God and what does he find when comes down from the mountain after being with God. The world is amok and these Israelites are worshipping, not God, but a golden calf? These stiff-necked people were just not worth it, all their complaining and griping all these years. He breaks the tablets on which the law is written.

And now Moses has to take this hard journey back up the mountain and face God with what has happened and plead for the very people that have made him so angry.

Moses went up the mountain, just as he was.

So, after climbing his mountain and being in God's presence, Moses comes down the mountain with the new tablets of the covenant, and when the Israelites saw him, Moses' face was shining and the people saw the glory of another chance, the glory of a God who doesn't give up on us, the glory of forgiveness and renewal. In Moses' shining face, the people saw the glory of God.

After reading Dr. Hunt's article about her question to Siri, I couldn't resist. One day when I was alone in the house and knew there was no one around to think I had gone whacko, I asked,

"Alexa, what does glory look like?"

She was not nearly as verbose as Siri. Her answer to me was "I don't the answer to that question, but I am sure if you check there is an ap."

Well, there isn't an AP or a GPS that maps out God's glory.

You may not have breath taking vistas on your Lenten Mountain. But you can expect the breath-taking presence of God. Listen as you become re-oriented to who holds your future. You might get knocked off your feet with the rocks and the roots along the way, but no matter the terrain, the scope, the height or hazards of your mountain, Jesus, God's Beloved Son will lead you, will put you in the presence of God's dazzling glory and lead you back the down the mountain carrying that dazzling light into the rough and tumble of this world.....

where the glory of God just might look like..... YOU!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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