

Which Way to Glory?
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The Monroe Congregational Church
February 7, 2016

Mark 8:27-9:8

Light of the world, transform our understanding. Show us the truth we grasp only dimly. Amen.

There are some watershed moments we'll never forget...

The flood of confusion and joy the first time someone said they love you – yes, *you*.

That time you were forgiven when you should *never* have been forgiven.

The day you got through *an entire 24 hours* without a drink.

The time you turned on the news and found out that that the *wall* was down and the *tyrants* were dead and people were crossing borders, *singing*.

Or that early morning walk just the other day... when the cloud that had threatened rain lifted, and from the top of that hill you swore you could see clear through to Canada, and it took your breath away.

In the strange slanting light you felt somehow *held, beloved, alive*, and it was like *The First Morning*, and you believed it was possible to be Brand New.

Even in the midst of the hardest grief, it comes to us, this glory.

It often arrives in stealth, when we least expect it. It flickers in the stillness, a facial expression, a touch, a place, a smell.

We know those moments.

And we have all wanted to build our homes on those heights and stay and stay and stay.

But it turns out that we cannot. Not because it isn't *good* for us to be on the summit and desire such glory. It is, in fact, a supreme good... because to want that glory is to desire God.

It is also true that while we await the final, full breakthrough of divinity upon the world, we have much work to do.

Not the work of busyness, with its demands and expectations, dread and drudgery, purpose and plan that our good pilgrim forebears taught is pleasing to God.

The work of people *of faith* is more wonder than competence, more surrender than skill, more beauty and imagination than programs, more gratitude and praise than exhaustion.

The call to discipleship is to witness in word, deed, and in awed silence that God is in fact re-creating everything, *even now*.

Our calling is to become increasingly alert to the places where transformation has already begun, and to point them out and tell the truth about what we see to those who cannot see, or do not believe what they see, those who languish in cynicism, sorrow and despair.

The mission of the church is to testify by overt gesture and secret resistance, in private and in public that grace is even now sparking in the tinder, glory is already lighting up the mountain, and all people, strangers, kin and enemies, are even now being included in the sweep of mercy, and brought home to sit at the table of peace.

Our calling is to develop a *capacity* to see beyond common sense and ordinary sight.

To see the world's suffering unflinchingly, exactly as it is, in places like LaPlant and Oaxaca, Charleston and Sandy Hook, Bridgeport and Flint *and* to see God already working *right there* a resurrection despite the heavy blanket of racism, poverty, abuse and despair.

I once was blind but now I see...

To spot the traces of love on the ground and in the bloodstained sky,
and announce them like watchers on the wall at daybreak,
and by our fearless announcement bring hope to everyone
who swears all hope is lost.

It means we must open ourselves to fire... to pray contemplatively,
to re-calibrate the eyes of our hearts by gazing on God.

The calling of the church, our calling, is hard work.

Stubbornly trusting what we cannot see more than the evidence at hand.
Resisting the caution of the earnest, the sensible, and the balanced...
Being glad that God is full of the kind of generosity that mocks our guilt-
ridden, self-important strategies...

It unhinges our anxious time management techniques...
and beats the heck out of our prudent long-range goals.

And to take delight in the odd God who pays latecomers the same wage as
those who grunt all day in the sun... and to never be ashamed of this Gospel.

Jesus' mission was to love the sinner, love the sinned against,
empty the proud, fill the poor, mend the brokenhearted, recognize the
unacceptable, speak truth to power, bless the weak and inadequate.

And in the face of all this divine *nonsense*, our calling is to lose our senses
just like Jesus did. *Who do you say that I am?*

In the late 4th century in the Syrian desert, a young monk named Lot went
out from his cave to consult an older, wiser monk whose name was Joseph.

Lot said to Joseph, "*Abba*, I am doing the best I can, I say my prayers, I
fast, I meditate, and I serve my neighbor. And yet, it seems like nothing
ever changes. Where's the glory in all of it? What am I missing? And what
else is there to do?"

The old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers
became like ten lamps of fire, and he said, "To do? Nothing more.
But you could become *all flame*." All flame... It would be good, it would be so
very good, for us to be *there*. Amen.