

Sermon: Transfiguration Sunday

The Rev. Mike Wernick

February 7, 2016

Year C

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36

There's an elephant in the room... do you see it... can you feel it... are we brave enough to name it... some of you may be looking at that football... it feels jarring to me for it to be there... it seems so out of place... you may think the elephant in the room is football... but it's really not... I think it's something more... but I put it there hoping it will help us see what that something more may be... I hope it will transform you...

And we are being transformed... we're being transfigured... from one degree of glory... into another... from one set of boundaries... into boundlessness... we are growing past our old selves... into our new selves... into the new life that is ours in Christ... *and the One who was seated on the throne said: I am making all things new...* from measurable glory to immeasurable Glory...

But because we have no measuring stick for immeasurable Glory... because we deal in finite things... because we use the points of reference we have... the measuring sticks we have available to us... the longest ones we have... we sometimes forget... that what they measure is not nearly enough for what they seek to measure... and the danger we face... is that we may begin to think... to believe... and to act as though the finite is the infinite... that a fast-food drive-through meal is the endless heavenly banquet...

Now we don't fault a child for being a child... we don't fault a fifth grader for having a fifth grade understanding of the Bible... but when we grow up... we need our understanding to grow up too... even though... in one of the paradoxes I like... is that the more answers we get... the more questions we have... we think that going up to the mountaintop always reveals pristine vistas... but sometimes it brings clouds instead... so like a child... we're not to be faulted for having finite measuring sticks... it's all we have... but when we look down instead of looking towards the stars... when anyone

says: *Oh I can never change...* when we lower our sights or settle for less... when we ignore all the things that point to infinite mystery... we are selling ourselves short...

Just a few vv. before today's Jewish scripture... in Exodus 33:18... Moses asks to see God's Glory... the Hebrew word is *kavod*... literally... *to be loaded down with riches*... having God's Glory is like being loaded down with riches... the two of them were having a conversation about the Israelites being God's people and God being their God... and Moses... wanting some kind of proof... wanting to know who it is who's making this audacious promise... he asks to see God's face... but God says *you cannot see my face... for no one shall see me and live*... and so a story that begins with a discussion of God's face... turns into one about Moses' face... and Moses... who once hid from God's face (in Ex. 3:6)... now has others hiding from his face...

When we look into another's face... we also look into their eyes... eyes that may be the gateway to the soul... as they say... and should our gaze be met by God's face... by more love than we feel able to accept... should our gaze be met by immeasurable Glory... we would die to our old selves and realize that all of our faces are shining... so maybe we seek glory to compensate for the false sense... the mistaken sense... that we are not worthy... and turn glory into something we can work for... something we can earn...

I have a first cousin who's only seven months younger than I am... he grew up in a family where being tough had great value and being weak did not... he grew up in a culture that's almost consumed with masculine bravado... and during high school he tried to earn glory by wrestling... and boxing... and playing football... up until about fifteen years ago he was OK... but now at 61... he cannot work or drive... he cannot live alone... cannot be unsupervised... he gets lost if he goes out alone... I believe it's because he suffered repeated impacts to his head over the years... so his wife is his caretaker... and they live in Mexico... because that's where they can afford to live...

At 6:30 tonight... the Carolina Panthers and the Denver Broncos will play in Super Bowl L (50)... the face value of this year's tickets ranges from \$850 to \$1,800... but the actual average price is \$4,957... and there is great glory at stake... professional football... and other sports convey great glory... since the time of the Roman Empire... people have been caught up in the spectacle of it all...

Around the year 100 AD... the Roman satirical poet Juvenal wrote Satire X... and coined the phrase *bread and circus*... he wrote this... because about 240 years earlier... Roman politicians passed laws to take the vote away from Rome's poorer citizens in exchange for free grain... trading involvement in their political birthright for bread and entertainment... contests between gladiators... and this distraction became the most effective way to rise to power...

Some NFL owners think they have... or may actually have so much power... that in the movie Concussion ... in a movie the NFL would not have made... in a movie that connects the dots between head impact... and the degenerative brain disease chronic traumatic en-ceph-a-lop-athy... first discovered in deceased NFL players... and that I believe my cousin has... in that movie one of the pathologists... tells Dr. Bennet Omalu ... the Nigerian pathologist (played by Will Smith)... tells him *the NFL owns a day of the week... the same day the church used to own... now it's theirs... they're VERY big...*

Perhaps we need the glory of sports to lift us up... because the world does not... perhaps we need the glory of sports so we can identify with the winners... because the world... and recently some political candidates... tell us what pathetic losers we are... perhaps we need the glory of sports to inspire us to improve ourselves... but here's where we begin to name the elephant in the room... there is glory with a small "g"... and Glory with a capital "G"... the glory that the world offers is fleeting... transitory... and forgettable... the Glory that God offers is permanent and eternal... it comes to us just as we are... whatever our condition or circumstance... the Glory that Jesus offers comes to us in the unanswered questions and messiness of our lives... even when we lose or

fall... the Glory that the Holy Spirit offers comes to us in our brokenness... even when our faces aren't shining...

On February 6, 2011... I was serving a church in Pittsburgh... some of you may remember that the Pittsburgh Steelers were playing in that particular Super Bowl... the entire city shut down... for the first time in collective memory the Heinz Chapel cancelled Evensong... and the Sr. Warden invited Joel and me to join her and her family and friends for a Super Bowl party... *and there didn't seem like any good way to get out of it...* so we went... and we stayed for hours... there was lots of good food... and fizzy-lifting drinks... and laughter and conversation... and football... I knew about touchdowns... but had a hard time following all the details of the game... I had to ask lots of questions... but Joel had an epiphany of sorts... he realized that these people... who gathered with a common purpose... formed community... that in some ways the game was just a backdrop for the hospitality and community... that what mattered was the formed community... we realized that not everyone was that much more interested in the game than we were... not *everyone* minded who won... not everyone was the same... just like those of us here are not the same... but together we formed community...

Lady Gaga's singing the National Anthem today... how can you miss that... and I acknowledge... I like most of the commercials... those four and a half million dollar thirty second commercials... I appreciate that there have been some that expose the domestic abuse that happens today... and as a result of this truth telling about head injury... some parents have taken their sons out of high school football... and the NFL has begun to acknowledge and address them...

Just a few vv. after today's Gospel... Luke reminds us that Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem... it reminds me that ours is not a social community that engages in some religious activities... but a religious community that engages in Gospel ministry... and some social activities... but we don't measure our success by the markers of the

world... by the world's definition of glory... we don't measure our success by average Sunday attendance or income or how large our altar party is... we measure our success here [heart]... so I ask us to consider... how can we help each other... and the world... keep the two kinds of glory separate and in perspective... continue to tell the truth about lesser kinds of glory... and how can we help each other keep our faces set towards Jerusalem too...

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