

Sermon Preached on  
Last Sunday after Epiphany  
(February 7, 2016)  
"Glory"

As I understand it, there's a football game this evening that's getting some of attention. Lots of 200-300 pound men crushing each other, all for the chance of glory.

Well, okay, for lots of money, too. But mostly glory!

Which begs the question: What **is** glory? And why do we use the same word for football and for what happened on the mountain in that event we call the Transfiguration? Because I just don't see them as having much in common.

To start off, maybe we should look at that word, Glory, as used in today's gospel. In the Greek, it is "doxa" - from which we get other words like doxology and orthodox. In Greek, it has several meanings including "brightness" (like the stars in heaven) but also "opinion" (as in having a high opinion of someone).

But here's where it gets complicated. You see, even though the Gospel was in Greek, the people in the Gospel spoke mostly Aramaic which is sort of a cousin to Hebrew. And, of course, Hebrew was the mother language of Jews then as now.

Which means that the disciples had a more Hebrew way of thinking - and the Hebrew word for glory is "kavod." Kavod means something like "heavy" - perfect for the NFL, right?

Only this sense of heavy is not just big and powerful. When Jews talk of God as Kavod, they mean beyond human power, they mean the weight of holiness. When something is kavod, it is to be taken seriously as it has gravitas.

So here, in the Transfiguration, we have Jesus shown in his glory. He literally shines brightly. Moreover, he's with Elijah and Moses, the human embodiment of the law and the prophets, the two heaviest hitters in Judaism. (To mix my sports metaphors). Jesus shines and has the weight of all who have gone before to back him up.

Clearly, when his disciples see Jesus' glory, they take him very seriously. The fact that God then speaks from the cloud and tells them to listen to him only reinforces the message.

But here's a question: why this glory at this particular point? I mean, they already confessed him to be the son of God. And why not tell anyone - because if you didn't catch it, they said nothing to anyone about what had happened until after the resurrection.

The answer is really quite simple. Right after this event, Jesus would begin his journey toward Jerusalem and the cross. It was going to be a long and difficult time, and the disciples would need something to hang onto, to sustain them in the days ahead. Seeing the glory of the Lord would do that. It would not only remind them of Jesus' divinity (brightness) but also of the importance (weight) of what they were doing.

Now, you might ask why they didn't tell anyone about this till afterward. Jesus often told people not to talk about his miracles, probably because they were never his main purpose, and they could distract from the main purpose of reconciliation.

But I suspect this time was different. Talking about Jesus' glory at that point might have been worse than a distraction. It might have made the passion impossible. Last night we watched the Bridge of Spies about the secret negotiations to release Francis Gary Powers. The lawyer who negotiated the exchange of spies had to do so without anybody knowing - not even his wife for fear of messing up the negotiations. It was a brave and good thing, but any glory or honor had to be delayed.

So this moment of glory for Jesus is just that - a moment. It reinforces for the disciples whom it is that they serve and just how important their work is. It sustains them in the coming storm.

We get to see that glory, too. In fact, we live in it, knowing who he is and what he did to bridge the gap between God and us. The difference between us and the disciples that day is, we don't have to keep it secret.

So whether you see brightness or heaviness in Jesus, know that it is glorious. Share that glory. Because Jesus' glory, unlike that of any Panther or Bronco, is forever. Amen