

2 Kings 2:1-12
Psalm 50:1-6
2 Corinthians 4:3-6
MARK 9:2-9

True Glory

Ever *think* you know someone and find out that there's a lot more – or a lot *less* – to them than you realized?

Pop culture in our country tends to swing to extremes regarding celebrities. At times, the adulation goes to extremes, and people glorify famous people who *seem* to have done great things – some of whom later are revealed as frauds. Lately, we are caught up with exposing frauds. Bernie Madoff, once so acclaimed as an investment wizard that otherwise intelligent people and otherwise respectable and sober charities entrusted billions of dollars to him, now is exposed as a mere con artist whose middle name seems to be “Ponzi scheme.”

On the tragically larger level – tragic for the world, not for them – investment bankers who were once thought to be geniuses for inventing esoteric financial derivatives based on mortgages that should never have been written are now exposed as inventors of, in Warren Buffet's phrase, “financial weapons of mass destruction.” The wreckage caused by their life's work lies all around the world. There was far, far *less* to them than it appeared.

And of course, there are celebrity athletes, especially certain baseball players whose legendary feats are now known or strongly suspected to have been “chemically enhanced.” Their hype also was as over-done as their pursuit of “glory” was fraudulent.

Sad to say, there are far, far more people who seek to glorify themselves in bogus or fraudulent ways. How many people are there who have cosmetic surgery purely for reasons of vanity, to look like someone they aren't to appear an age they haven't been for some time? How many people are there who made up parts of their résumés from inflating job titles to listing degrees they never earned from institutions of higher learning they never attended? How many people have maxed out credit cards, signed up eagerly for exotic mortgages and stretched their finances to the limit just to impress others – or perhaps themselves? – with their spending?

Here is the appearance [I hold my hand high], and here is the reality [I hold my thumb and forefinger an inch apart]. How many people have sought to glorify themselves only to have the effort end in disaster for themselves, for others, or for both? How many peoples' reality is a whole lot *less* than their appearance? How many people are *over-hyped* and *under-deliver*?

Jesus, by contrast, was *under-hyped* and *over-delivered*, and the reality of Jesus was far, far greater than the initial appearance. *Some* celebrities' home-town fans think the person can walk on water; Jesus *could* walk on water but *his* “homies” said of him (in Matthew 13:54-58), “Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers

James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? Where did this man get all this?’ and they took offense at him.” His hometown folks did everything but ask him for a urine sample and demand an audit.

But if in fact you “audited” Jesus, the carpenter’s son, the brother of James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, you got the transfiguration.

Want to see who Jesus *really* is? Walk up the mountain – no, not little “Mount” Tabor the tourist buses drive up, but rugged, snow-capped, 9,200 foot Mt. Hermon in Syria near Caesarea Philippi where just six days before Peter had said “You are the Christ.” Where just six days before, Peter had then denied that Jesus *being* the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior included his being tortured and executed before rising again. Walk up *that* mountain with Peter, James and John. It’s not an easy hike. Then see two *real* “Hall of Famers” – Elijah, the first and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, and Moses, who brought the 10 Commandments down to the people of Israel from another mountaintop called Sinai and see the greatest figures from Israel’s past be literally eclipsed by the glory of the One you *thought* you knew: the carpenter’s son from Nazareth.

Some people today think they know him, but have tried to “domesticate” him into their own little personal god with a lower-case “g.” Maybe you know this song: “I don’t care if it rains or freezes, ‘long as I got my plastic Jesus sittin’ on the dash board of my car.” People can have an image of Jesus which is like that without the statuette, sad to say. Some people go further and say they believe in “angels” without being too sure they believe in God – which means they want a personal supernatural force to come when they call and take care of them, which is not at all what angels are. Real angels are messengers of the real God.

Jesus is the real deal, the real Christ, the One whose reality is so awesome that only a handful of his closest (though still lovably clueless) followers are allowed to go off into a remote wilderness and catch a brief glimpse of his true reality, his true heavenly nature as the incarnate Son of God. All but St. Peter-the-impossible-to-shut-up were silent, and then even *he* was quiet when listening to the Voice of God say, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Sounds like a plan.

Lent starts on Wednesday. Let each and all of us take time to reflect on what *real* glory is (hint: it comes from God) and to swear off chasing bogus self-made pseudo-glory. Let each and all of us take time apart from our daily routines to be with God and be quiet. Even Peter could, eventually; so can we. Let us then descend from the mountaintop and, like Christ, find ways not to be served but to serve, through Lent – and forever.

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