**Pondering the Glory**

**2 Kings 2:1,11-14
Mark 9:2-9**

**In a few minutes, with the help of Tom Murphy, you will get to hear the title song from the movie Selma. The song is entitled Glory. However, before we see the clip I would like to share with you a little background that provides context and relevancy for our Scripture lesson and the song we will here.**

**Although the word is no where found in our Gospel lesson today, Biblical commentators reflecting on the story of Jesus transfiguration on the mountain top, nonetheless, invariably turn to one of the only words that seem capable of capturing the significance of the moment, “glory”. Marilyn Adams writing about the transfiguration says, “What Mark’s Gospel works to drive home is how – for Jesus’ first disciples – resurrection glory proved more of a scandal than crucifixion”. Glory. Stanley Saunders writing about the transfiguration of Jesus notes “the significance of Moses and Elijah who both beheld the glory of God on the mountaintop during times of trial.” Glory.**

**Particularly important, however, for our understanding of this song from Selma and its relationship to the transfiguration of Jesus is what South African theologian and Biblical scholar Allan Boseak says about the understanding of glory for the Black church in the U.S. Glory he says “is not the glory of majestic, resplendent, beautiful buildings…Neither is it the glory of reveling in our own self-aggrandizement…Glory signifies the transcendental present – not a passive waiting for a future in Heaven, but actions to be taken by the dispossessed, to create Heaven on earth…This is what shouts of “glory!” in the Black church means when shouted in response to the realities of pain and struggle. We do not glorify suffering, but we rejoice in the fact that we might be part of the struggle even if it causes pain and suffering, because it is the road to victory. Glory. Let’s listen.**

*John Legend "Glory" lyrics

One day, when the glory comes
It will be ours, it will be ours
Oh, one day, when the war is one
We will be sure, we will be here sure
Oh, glory, glory
Oh, glory, glory

Hands to the Heavens, no man, no weapon
Formed against, yes glory is destined
Every day women and men become legends
Sins that go against our skin become blessings
The movement is a rhythm to us
Freedom is like religion to us
Justice is juxtaposition in us
Justice for all just ain't specific enough
One son died, his spirit is revisitin' us
Truant livin' livin' in us, resistance is us
That's why Rosa sat on the bus
That's why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up
When it go down we woman and man up
They say, "Stay down" and we stand up
Shots, we on the ground, the camera panned up
King pointed to the mountain top and we ran up

One day, when the glory comes
It will be ours, it will be ours
Oh, one day, when the war is one
We will be sure, we will be here sure
Oh, glory, glory
Oh, glory, glory glory

Now the war is not over
Victory isn't won
And we'll fight on to the finish
Then when it's all done
We'll cry glory, oh glory
We'll cry glory, oh glory

Selma's now for every man, woman and child
Even Jesus got his crown in front of a crowd
They marched with the torch, we gon' run with it now
Never look back, we done gone hundreds of miles
From dark roads he rose, to become a hero
Facin' the league of justice, his power was the people
Enemy is lethal, a king became regal
Saw the face of Jim Crow under a bald eagle
The biggest weapon is to stay peaceful
We sing, our music is the cuts that we bleed through
Somewhere in the dream we had an epiphany
Now we right the wrongs in history
No one can win the war individually
It takes the wisdom of the elders and young people's energy
Welcome to the story we call victory
Comin' of the Lord, my eyes have seen the glory

One day, when the glory comes
It will be ours, it will be ours
Oh, one day, when the war is one
We will be sure, we will be here sure
Oh, glory, glory
Oh, glory, glory glory

When the war is done, when it's all said and done
We'll cry glory, oh glory*

**As Boseak reminds us the glory of faith has no relationship to the glory athletes, politicians or anyone might claim upon some great success or achievement. It has nothing to do with the marvels of a new Vikings stadium being built in Minneapolis. Just the opposite this glory, the glory of God, is not dependent on personal stories of success or human achievement. Brian Blount, a prominent African American Biblical scholar, points to the glory reflected in the transfiguration of Jesus when he says, the story Mark tells is a story in which “God opens a pocket of the future in the midst of the present.” The transfiguration represents the power of God’s love invading and transforming our world. Like Blount, Biblical scholar Rodney Hunter, refers to the transfiguration of Jesus as an apocalyptic moment breaking through the ordinary, reminding us of the extraordinary power of God’s grace and love. Glory. God’s glory offered to our present.**

**The presence of Moses who beheld the glory of God reminds us God is a God of freedom and liberation for the oppressed and Jesus is the incarnation of that glory. The presence of Elijah who beheld the glory of God reminds us God is a God of justice and Jesus is the incarnation of that justice. Mark wants to be clear, the impending death of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, can only be understood from the perspective of God’s glory. Death does not win. Evil does not win. Suffering does not win. Jesus God’s glory, God’s resurrection presence is in the mix from the beginning, transforming our struggles, our losses, and all the manifestations of injustice we encounter. Glory.**

**The problem for the disciples, which is often our problem as well, is the strong tendency to get fixed on human manifestations of glory. Glory we conclude is only relevant when things are going our way, everything is as we hope it will be. There is no loss, no discouragement, no pain, no struggle. We associate glory with our own small victories and our own small achievements. Upon encountering the glory of Jesus, the first thing Peter wants to do is build something. “Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.” Glory only becomes tangible when you can say, see what we have done, see what we have accomplished. Look here is the proof.**

**But Jesus makes clear, the glory of God’s future, the glory of God’s love and justice is never defined, constrained or limited by what we can do. Nor is that glory constrained or limited by the challenges we face. This is why Jesus tells the disciples to remain silent about the glory they have seen. They need the resurrection perspective to fully comprehend.**

**As many of you know, it was a year ago that our congregation brought a resolution to the Minnesota Conference UCC calling upon our conference to more fully engage the work of overcoming racism. As a result much of this year’s conference is dedicated to presentations and conversations intended to help deepen our understanding and commitments.**

**Okogyeamon and I are part of the planning team. Okogyeamon sent me an email this week that said, “the one concern I have is that some who would wish to assume leadership do not yet understand the depths of US racism, do not know the ‘language’ of the work, or are maybe in the early stages of their own racial self-understanding. This means that those who wish to assume leadership would need to commit to guided study and possibly a couple of half-day workshops.”**

**Jesus knows the disciples are in need of at least a couple of resurrection workshops if they are to comprehend the “glory of God.” Jesus is calling disciples, seeking to shape a community, who have the courage to be agents of God’s glory. Rodney Hunter puts it this way, “Christians are not called to exhibit a passive love that simply tries to be good and avoid evil…It is rather a vigorous, assertive pursuit of social, personal righteousness through a love that refuses to play the world’s power games of domination, exploitation, greed and deception. The transfiguration story is a call to affirm the ultimate truth of this contrary claim of God and God’s way of salvation, and to begin to live it with all our heart, soul and strength in the confidence that Jesus’ nonviolent way is truly the way of salvation, healing and eternal life.” Glory.**

**As I mentioned during the announcements, the Council of Cherokee Park United, upon the recommendation of Building Block Ministry, made the decision this week to end Building Blocks Tutorial after 27 years of serving children in the St. Paul Public schools. It was a difficult decision, forced upon us, by decisions of St. Paul Public school officials. A lot of heart, soul and dedication has gone into Building Blocks by Jill, our tutors, those on the Building Blocks Ministry Team, this congregation. It is hard to see it end.**

**Heading home from the Council meeting Jill heard on MPR a quote being shared by David Brooks from a speech at Aspen. It is in the form of a prayer and this is what it says, “Lord, high and holy, Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in depths but see Thee in the height; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision. Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from the deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine; let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy life in my death, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley.**

**Glory! Glory! Glory!**

**2 Kings 2:1,11-14**

***Our first lesson comes at a time of leadership transition for the people of Israel. The prophet Elijah’s time as a prophet is coming to a close and the time of the prophet Elisha is about to begin. But, this is no ordinary transition in prophetic leadership. No one present could ever fully describe what they witnessed, but they were left with no doubt that the ministry of Elijah and the soon to be ministry of Elisha was profoundly shaped by the glory of Godl***

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel…..As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

**Mark 9:2-9**

*Our second lesson tells the story of what has come to be known as the “transfiguration” of Jesus. It is a time in which the three disciples with Jesus, suddenly see Jesus is a completely new way. Like Moses and Elijah, both of whom have seen the glory of God, Jesus becomes for the disciples the very presence of God’s glory.*

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.