



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Dannals, *Interim Rector*

"The Gift of Glory"

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock am service, February 7, 2016
The Last Sunday After the Epiphany—Based on Luke 9:28-36*

A number of years ago in early February, I was traveling with my bishop, Dorsey Henderson, to a church meeting out of town. When we arrived at the airport to check in, the airline counter employee looked at our hands because we were both sporting large rings on our right hands. "Are those Super Bowl Rings?", she asked. "Ha," the Bishop exclaimed. "Lady, do these bodies look like 'Super Bowl Bodies'?", he added. "What are they?", she asked back. I said, "we'll his is a bishop's ring because he is the Episcopal Bishop of Upper South Carolina, and mine is a graduate school ring from Oxford." Pause. Then she blurted out: "Well 'la-tee-da!' ... isn't THAT special!"

Welcome to Super Bowl Sunday, but more importantly, welcome to Annual Meeting Sunday, and to the Last Sunday After the Epiphany, also known as "Transfiguration Sunday."

In our gospel text, Jesus ascends Mt. Tabor with his three primary disciples, Peter, James and John, and something very powerful happened: Jesus was "glorified." Simply put ... Jesus became luminous, irradiated with God's light and life and love. We're told in the text that Jesus' face "shone like the sun," and a voice came from above and exclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him."

It is at that moment that the spiritual formation of Peter, James and John reached a significant turning point. The crucial moment in their life — and in ours as well — is when God speaks to affirm Jesus as the full revelation of God, as the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. And the Gospel of John adds to this glory, when Jesus prays to the Father: "The glory that you have given me I have given them," that is, given to you here, now in St. Bart's Church, on the day of our Annual Meeting, and to each of us individually:

... It's the GIFT OF GLORY.

Can you and I imagine for a moment that God is holding out to us this gift? And can we imagine then receiving it? Up until taking hold of it, it is not yet a gift, it's merely a promise or an intention. Now Jesus has a gift intended for you ... and for me ... and for us — the gift of glory. Will we take hold of it? And if we receive this gift it will make a world of difference in how we live our lives. How? Here's how!

Dare to enjoy your life. Laugh more. Notice the beauty around you. Eat slowly enough to guess at the spices. Listen for the oboe at the symphony. Watch your pet watching you. Experience what good architecture does for your soul. Notice how shadows make life so much more interesting. Hum and whistle more. Turn off your electric devices at least once per week, and just sit quietly, and listen to your life. Say, "thank you" at least a dozen times a day. Discover the allure of water ... enjoy a walk down the East or Hudson River. Close your eyes and imagine where God might be taking you next. Create something new. Remember who it was, that first person who got you through a tough challenge, who convinced you that you could do it. Reclaim your most notorious failure, and what you've learned from that event. Find something that makes you laugh. Remember the last time you cried ... why, what happened? Remember your first love.

What am I inviting us do? To receive the gift of glory. To take nothing for granted; to take everything with gratitude. Dare to enjoy your life, and the life of this church. To recognize how God is moving in our lives.

So you might ask is that all there is to glory? Daring to enjoy one's life, is THAT glory? Well, it's part of it! The gift is also known in community, in groups, in the church.

We're told in the Book of Common Prayer that to receive God's glory as the church makes us "The Body of Christ," a "Royal Priesthood," "The Community of the Holy Spirit," a "Holy Nation," the "New Israel." Now we might stumble a little over those titles, because that sounds like so much more than our regular experience. Sadly, we don't always realize this glory, we don't always live with gratitude and faithfulness and expectancy and with joyful inspiration.

Some years ago, I came across a little story called "Children Playing Church." It's a skit, really, and the characters are Jim, Carol, Millie, Fred, and Bill.

Jim: To play church, first we need a building.
Carol: No, we need people first.
Millie: We've got to have a Bishop and a Rector.
Jim says to Fred: You be the Rector.
Fred: What do I do?
Bill: Preach sermons that make people mad!
Jim: No, you call on the old people and you scold the children.
Bill says to Millie: You be the Bishop.
Millie: Oh, good, I like to accessorize.
Carol: Does that mean she wears the funny beanie and the pointed hat?
Fred: Yes, I've always thought we should put a propeller on the beanie.
Carol: Let's take up an offering.
Millie: Let's have a service.
Jim: Let's criticize the sermon.
Fred: I didn't preach one yet.
Bill: We'll criticize it anyway.
Millie: Very little Bible content in that sermon.
Jim: I couldn't hear half of it.
Carol: I didn't like the half I heard.
Jim: We are in a financial bind.
Millie: What's that?
Jim: I don't know, my dad is the Warden and he likes to say that.
Fred: It means we need money.
Carol: Let's sell lemonade.
Bill: If we don't like the sermon, why give?
Jim: That's what my mom says.
Carol: Let's do outreach.
Jim: What's that?
Bill: That's when we who have a lot feel really guilty and we give away to poor people all
of our leftovers.
Jim: I have some old tennis shoes.
Millie: No one wants your stinking old shoes.

(We're getting near the end.)

Fred: Can't we enjoy Church?
Carol: No, mom says it's a sacrifice.
Fred: What's that?
Carol: Stuff you do because you hate to.
Fred: Why?
Carol: Because God loves us more when we're miserable.
Fred ends the play: Why don't we play something else?

Certainly that's a far cry from the joyful, purposeful, inspiring community intended by God's gift of glory.

To be sure, the church does not always live its intended purpose. And to be sure, we stumble on this business of glory

when we witness so much suffering, despair, deceit, cruelty, injustice and death in our world. In this world, we have to make space in our soul to life amidst both the best and the worst ... as the Apostle Paul says: "To rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep."

When the gift of glory was extended to Peter his first instinct was to build a booth around it. He wanted to contain it and keep it for himself. But he was given the gift... we are given the gift ... to give it away.

The story of the Transfiguration is always read on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. So, on the eve of Lent, we are shown that Peter could not contain the glory of God on Mt. Tabor. At journey's end, Mary Magdalene will find that she cannot hold onto the resurrected Christ in the garden outside the tomb. Neither could box up God as their little prize. The gift of glory is for all people, and it's given to be given away.

Many years ago, I visited Mt. Tabor for the first time. In that Holy Place we decided to offer prayer. The liturgy was led by a fellow seminarian, an African American Episcopalian from Los Angeles, Ken Miller. Ken's home church had been damaged badly during the Watt's Riots of the 1960s. Ken's life experiences had taught him something important. He said in his homily that day: "Every encounter with another human being has the potential to be destructive or to be holy. When two people encounter each other, they either deal death or they give life. We deal death," he said, "when we criticize, belittle, misunderstand, ignore, boast, and insist upon our own way. We give life when we notice, affirm, thank, listen, smile, rejoice, encourage and give God glory. Something special happens," he concluded, "when we give life ... we are transfigured with Jesus, a light shines forth, a holiness is experienced. Look in the most unlikely places, in the people who seem the most unlovable, and we'll find cracks through which we can pour God's glory."

The voice said from above, "This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him." Learn from him, shape your life according to his example, be inspired by his witness and service, share his glory lavishly with all people.

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