



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 27, 2022  
EXODUS 34:29-35; PSALM 99; 2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:2; LUKE 9:28-36

## LUMINOUS LEARNINGS IN WARTIME

*Luke 9:28-36 [About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.]*

The sermon I had conjured midweek for today was necessarily redirected by the intervening weight of war that began in Ukraine Thursday and continues to unfold in rather trepidatious ways. This last Sunday after Epiphany always features the Transfiguration of Jesus to lift our spirits before we head into Lent, but any straightforward ascent to bask in the

mountaintop experience of Christ's glory has been diverted by the drumbeat of hostility—human against human, all made in the image of God—with implications far reaching for an entire globe of human suffering. We are all in this together, and so our hearts are indeed heavy this morning as we consider how to respond in the moment.

To angle in on that question of how to respond, I want to draw on a sermon by C.S. Lewis which he preached at Oxford in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. The sermon, entitled “Learning in War-Time,” was delivered in October 1939, six weeks after Germany invaded Poland, which had drawn Britain into the war by the time this sermon was preached.<sup>1</sup> The young students were naturally asking the question why bother with the pursuit of education when it seems a trivial enterprise in the face of war, or worse, even irresponsible. I know an analogous argument was made in light of the pandemic, which is to say, the question has legs across an array of crises, including those of our day.

Lewis was a veteran of the First World War, wounded there, and by the time he preached this sermon, he had considerable life experience which led him to argue, in the first place, that if we were to wait for the crisis of humanity to end before we began learning, we would never begin learning. There have always been, and always will be crises of the human condition.

But more importantly, the exercise of learning (that is, seeking truth and beauty

and goodness) for these students, Lewis argued, was really about the existential matter of being present to their current location as spiritual work. In making this argument, Lewis draws on Luther’s theology of vocation captured in this familiar quote: “The work of Beethoven, and the work of a charwoman, become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God...”<sup>2</sup>

War should make us think more seriously about living our lives in reference to God. This leads me to the Benedictine value of “stability,” that invites one to contemplate and discover God in one’s current location rather than search for another place where God might be more readily apprehended. This is not a prohibition to movement; rather it is staking the claim that stability in the spiritual journey of life is experienced precisely when you discover that God is everywhere, including your present location, and we are invited to seek God’s glory in our midst, wherever that may be.<sup>3</sup>

So let me say that whatever the war in Ukraine may stir for you, the invitation to us all is to hold it prayerfully, lamenting the weight of humanity’s capacity to harm one

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<sup>1</sup> For a transcript of the sermon: <https://bradleygreen.com/attachments/Lewis.Learning%20in%20War-Time.pdf>. Additional commentary at <https://www.cslewis.com/learning-in-war-time/>

<sup>2</sup> As cited by Lewis, <https://www.cslewis.com/learning-in-war-time/>

<sup>3</sup> The Benedictine values of stability, obedience, and conversion of life are well-suited to this vocational effort as spiritual work. A good summary is at [https://www.episcopalcafe.com/stability\\_conversion\\_of\\_life\\_and\\_obedience/](https://www.episcopalcafe.com/stability_conversion_of_life_and_obedience/)

another, yearning for peace, but also tending to our daily lives here as an act of spiritual faith. The question is, how will God be glorified in your life today?

Now I need to say a few things about the notion of glory before we go further. It is a prevalent word in our scriptures today—indeed, in our scriptures generally, our liturgy is salted through and through with the language of praise, but “glory” also figures prominently in the lexicon of war, which means we must unpack the word if we are to understand its bearing on our lives as people of faith in this time.

We are likely most familiar with the scriptural term in reference to God’s glory—respect, honor, majesty, all of which evokes our sense of praise—or as it comes with angels appearing before humans in biblical tales where the angels bring an aura “of the glory of the Lord.” In the Transfiguration, Jesus is glorified as the voice from heaven comes once more. As followers of Christ, we are promised an experience of heavenly glory in our own right. Or by extrapolation, since we are made in the image of God, all humans are imbued with this capacity for glory.

But there is a slipperiness to this notion, especially when set against the backdrop of men seeking glory in human terms, mainly

through war or other notorious acts. Power, prestige, notoriety are the elemental desires bound up in this glorified approach to worldly life, which is really vanity, not glory. We intend something different.

It is a part of our nature to desire fame, or respect, but Lewis suggests there is a conversion of the desire needed as we seek to be known by God. This is not fame bestowed by our fellow humans, in worldly terms; rather fame with God, or being known and seen by God who is pleased with us simply for who we are. By holding that in our hearts, and knowing it to be true, life is changed.

This is the conversion of life of which Jesus speaks repeatedly for those willing to listen. He will go down from the mountain, and on to the cross, and into the radiant glory of resurrection, inviting us to follow him. Lewis wraps back to the other sense of glory—that of luminosity, brightness, splendor. We are to shine like the sun...to let our lights shine in this world...”to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.”

The gift of glory, then, is at once this invitation to praise and glorify God as the source and ground of being, and to see the gift of our luminous being connected with God as a clear and present reality, for our

benefit, but importantly, for the world to see as well. The world desperately needs your lightness of being in these difficult times. And it will make a difference.

So press on in your life's work, especially in the face of war, count it as spiritual endeavor, offer it and yourself to God; let God be glorified in your life; know that you are beloved by God, too, and in that timeless truth lies the gift of glory that will change everything about you.

In my family we have long sang a prayer guided by this sweet truth. It goes: "In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified." I will sing it once through then invite you to make it your prayer as well.

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In my life, Lord, be glorified today.