

“Amazing Amazingness”

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Scripture:

Luke 9:28-43 (NRSV)

“28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 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. 33 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. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 36 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.

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. 39 Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” 41 Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” 42 While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. 43 And all were astounded at the greatness of God.”

The Sermon:

Amazing – I use that word a lot. Amazing actually means – “causing great surprise or wonder; astonishing” Synonyms include: astonishing, astounding, surprising, stunning, staggering, shocking, startling, stupefying, breathtaking. But that’s not how I use it. I often use it for much more ordinary things. Just in the past few days, I’ve use the word amazing to describe my breakfast, a sunset, and my wife (well, OK, she IS amazing).

If I wanted to more properly express my meaning on each of those items, I would have said, my breakfast was tasty, the sunset was colorful, and my wife, well, she’s kind, compassionate, fun-loving, and beautiful. The reason “amazing” doesn’t properly describe those events, is because they do not invoke great surprise or wonder. My breakfast of bacon and eggs, prepared by my wonderful wife, was tasty, but I often have bacon and eggs, and tasty as they are, I am not astonished by them.

The sunset was gorgeous, but the sun goes down every day, so though the colors might be called indescribable, they were not actually breathtaking. **We often use superlative words to describe everyday events, so what words are left to describe the truly amazing?**

I’m taking a Directed Studies course this quarter at Eastern, just one-on-one with a history professor, who also happens to be fluent in Greek. Our original plan was to study Koine’, or Biblical, Greek together, but I simply don’t have the brain power this term to learn a whole language; but she enjoys translating ancient texts, so the other day when we met, we went over this scripture, word for word, in Greek. My prof had her Greek New Testament and Greek dictionary, and I had my English bible and a notebook. (I could honestly sit there forever and study like that.) Anyway, we worked our way through this text, and I’m going to just mention a few of the very cool things we discovered. Well, I thought they were cool; it remains to be seen if **you** do...

“While He was praying” our text says, “the appearance of His face changed, and his clothes became *dazzling white*.” (Like a flash of lightening or like a star) - **Jesus shone like a “flash of lightening” - His heavenly nature showing through the human.**

Verses 30-31 - “Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to Him. They *appeared in glory*” - this use of the word glory differs from the second use...

“And Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep. . . but awakened . . . they saw *His glory*, and the two men standing with Him.” **The difference lies in the noun tense in Greek. (you all did come here to learn Greek, right?)**

But seriously, there’s a difference. In the first use, in verse 31, the New Revised Standard Version of the text, the one *our liturgist* (who?) read, says, “the men appeared in glory, but to truly catch the correct meaning from the Greek, you would have to say it like this, “two men that stood with him: Moses and Elias, and the glory in which they appeared.” It was not the two men who had the glory; **there was glory, and the two men appeared in it.** The glory is distinctly separate from the men.

However, in the second use, in verse 32, it says that Peter and John and James, “saw His glory”, and in this instance, the glory belongs to Jesus. **It is *His glory*.**

Now, I don't want to take anything from Moses and Elijah, I'm sure they were nice guys. Moses did the whole, “Let my people go,” thing, and freed the children of Israel from oppression and slavery in Egypt, (which I'm sure they appreciated and everything) and Elijah was a great prophet who called down fire from heaven, (an excellent skill to have on a soggy night when you're camping) but let's be honest; the power and the glory that *they were given*, was just that, **given – it was not theirs, it was given to them by God.**

So, after seeing Jesus transfigured in this way, Peter has this great idea, he asks Jesus, whom he calls “Master” – not Teacher, but Boss – if he and James and John can build three “dwellings” – three huts – for Moses and Elijah and Jesus to stay in, because, it says, Peter did not know what Jesus said. Whatever Jesus, Moses and Elijah had been discussing, **Peter, in his amazement, had missed it.**

And, to emphasize how shrouded in ignorance Peter is, a cloud “shaded them” the Greek says, and “fear enveloped them.” Ignorance and fear are what keep Peter, and us I would say, from hearing what Jesus says, or at least, from understanding it fully.

Then, from the cloud, or as I hear it, “While they were in the midst of their darkness” the voice of God said, “this is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!” A metaphor, perhaps, of the darkness that veils all our eyes, and prevents us from seeing the truth; and how God doesn't leave us in the darkness, but comes to us right where we are, to bring us the truth.

The text goes on to tell us, “And they kept silent”, but in the Greek there's a slightly different feel to that statement. “They kept silent” sounds like it was their idea, but the feeling in the Greek is more like, “they were silenced”, or even stronger, “they were shut up”.

The next section of this text narrates a scene in which the disciples are unable to heal a young boy. The disciples “had not the power” to cast out the spirit from the boy, so the father begs Jesus to heal his son. **Jesus' reaction is one of what? Disappointment? Frustration? Anguish over our blindness?**

Jesus' answer to the father is poignant; “how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?” But again our English translations fail to give us the full significance of this phrase. Jesus says he is “**holding myself for you,**” or “**making myself put up with you.**” Jesus comes to us willingly and stays with us on His own terms. No one makes Him do it; He does it of His own accord.

Jesus, in His glory, overcomes evil, promotes healing, and brings wholeness to the community. Such is the power of His glory.

“And all were astonished at the greatness of God.” The English word ‘greatness’ comes from the Greek word - *Mega-lay-aw'-tase*. Other English translations render it as majesty or superbness, splendor, glory, magnificence, mighty power. **But my professor noticed something in the Greek dictionary that surprised her.** There's a sense of compounding the emphasis of the word.

We probably all recognize the **root word MEGA**, meaning big, but in this word, megalayawtase, it means the biggest of the big. Or the big-ish-ness. It's big-est-ness. Am I just being silly? Maybe.

To properly understand the glory of God, we might have to use words that don't exist, because our minds can't grasp the depth of the greatness of the glory of God anyway. "And all were astonished at the *great greatness* of God." The *majestic majesty*; the *magnificent magnificence*. **The amazing amazingness.**

Jesus was transfigured – before their eyes they saw Him in all His glory. For a few seconds or a few minutes, a few humans got to see Him "in His glory". And they were *amazed...*

But why? If we believe that Jesus is God, if we believe in His divinity, then why are we amazed at His glory? Jesus came from glory, far outside our understanding, far outside our imagination, and once in a while we get a glimpse of His glory – at His baptism, in His power to heal, His ability to calm wind and sea. Here, at His transfiguration, and later... they will see Him resurrected. **This is the power and the glory of God revealed in human flesh – Jesus Christ – Emmanuel – God with us.**

What's amazing to me isn't these glimpses of His divine nature, what's amazing isn't Jesus' revealed transcendence, **what's amazing is His coming to earth. Jesus' self-limiting of that divine nature in order to live fully as a human, THAT is truly amazing.**

Amen.

Please stand with me as you are able, as we sing, our Hymn of Response - #316

Prayer of Assurance

Holy God, present in our midst yet beyond all comprehension,
by your light, we see light;
by your healing, we are made whole;
by your mercy, we know your greatness.

Turn your gaze upon our weakness and show us the way of your love that we may live with unveiled faces, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Charge

Since we have such hope, live and act with boldness! Love and serve the Lord in the freedom of the Spirit.

Benediction

May the glory of the Lord shine upon you,
the Word of the Lord live within you,
and the Spirit of the Lord give you peace.