

**NEW TESTAMENT LESSON:** Luke 9:28-36  
**SERMON TITLE:** “Glory for the Road”

Have you ever taken a journey that you didn’t really want to take? Well, I have. Back in 1993, we got word that my dad had colon cancer that had spread to his liver. The odds were high that this cancer would take my father’s life. So this news began for me an emotional and spiritual journey that I didn’t really want to take.

The journey lasted for two years. During that time, I watched my father’s health decline. I watched him suffer through the chemo and later, through the final stages of the disease itself. I watched my mom struggle to care for him.

Throughout this whole process I confronted my own mortality and I wrestled with what it would mean to no longer have my dad in my life.

Well, we were living in Fredericksburg when the call came. My dad wasn’t expected to make it through the night. My mom told us to come home to Beeville—and we did. That trip from Fredericksburg to Beeville was another one that I really didn’t want to make. But we made it--and by the grace of God, I arrived at the hospital in time to tell my dad goodbye. He died shortly after I arrived. It was April 20, 1995.

Sometimes in life we have to take journeys that we really don’t want to take. In fact, the Lenten journey we begin this week can be just this sort of experience. We’ll be moving toward the cross and we’ll be confronting some rather unpleasant issues like suffering and sacrifice and death.

Speaking of journeys we don’t want to take, in the verses immediately preceding this morning’s reading, Jesus speaks with his disciples for the first time about what lies ahead. He tells them that *The Son of Man must undergo great sufferings, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* This sounds to me like one of those journeys we don’t really want to take.

And it’s not just Jesus who will pay a price. Jesus says to all of his disciples: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves take up their cross daily and follow me.*

***For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?***

Is this a journey that any of us want to take?

Well, it's at this point in Luke's gospel that an extraordinary story is told. About eight days after Jesus spoke to his disciples about the road ahead, he went up to a mountain to pray. He took with him his inner circle of disciples: Peter, John and James. While Jesus was praying, he was transfigured: ***the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white***. Suddenly, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah appearing in glory and talking with Jesus. They were speaking of his departure—or literally, his exodus—that was soon to be accomplished in Jerusalem. All of these elements connect this event with significant moments and figures of Israel's past.

Well, Peter and the others were sleepy, but they stayed awake and saw his glory and the other two men with him. As Moses and Elijah were leaving, 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***. The story says that Peter didn't know what he was asking. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ***This is my Son, the Chosen; listen to him!*** After the voice, Jesus was there alone. Luke says that the three disciples kept quite at that time about what they had seen.

So what does this story have to do with taking those journeys through life that we really don't want to take? Well, it seems to me that this story of the transfiguration of Jesus is intended to prepare us for those journeys of life that involve suffering and death.

Those three disciples were being prepared. Difficult days were ahead. Jesus would soon be setting his face toward Jerusalem. Suffering and death were going to be part of the story. And let's face it, while in the midst of this journey they didn't want to take—in the midst of pain and grief and fear—they might well be blinded to God's presence and God's purpose. They might be tempted to forget who Jesus was and what he was about. Their faith might not survive

the experience!

So up on the mountaintop, the disciples were given glory for the road. They were given an epiphany--a revelation of God. They were given a preview of the resurrection. The message was clear: Jesus was the bearer of God's glory. Jesus was the Son of God—the chosen one—the one to whom they should listen especially when he spoke words hard to hear about his own fate, about life and death and suffering, and about the costly way of discipleship.

Frankly, I can understand why Peter wanted to build the booths and prolong this experience of glory. He didn't want to make the journey of suffering and death anymore than we do.

But the journey has to be made. There's no staying on the mountaintop. Luke remembers this story so that we might be prepared—so that our faith will see us through—so that we'll look for God and anticipate life even when we're faced with suffering and death. And who knows, when life's journey leads us into desperate circumstances, perhaps we too can discern the glory of Christ and be transfigured and transformed ourselves.

This is certainly what happened to me with my father. Through all my grief and suffering, God transformed me. God helped me to grow up, to accept my own mortality, and to trust more deeply in Christ. God reassured me that even in death, there is life. So even in my father's death, I beheld the glory of Christ—and because of that, I experienced a joy and peace I can't even begin to understand.

And this is not just my story. On a Monday afternoon in Fredericksburg back in 2000, I went to the hospital to do some visiting. As I was standing at the front desk going down the list of patients, I spotted a familiar name: Charles Mohr. Charles was in ICU.

Now Charles and I were good friends. He was the pastor the Lutheran congregations in Doss and Cherry Springs. He had served those two churches for about 34 years. We had worked together many times when I was the pastor of the United Methodist churches at Hilda and Castell.

Well, when I went up to the ICU and walked into his room, I was stunned. There were tubes running everywhere. He was in a coma. And I couldn't imagine what had happened to him.

As it turned out, he had suffered several strokes. He had performed a wedding on the Saturday before. He had conducted two worship services on Sunday morning. But on Sunday evening, he wound up in the hospital. He was obviously not doing well.

When I returned to the hospital on Tuesday and went to see Charles, I ran into his son Victor. We joined hands at his father's bedside and prayed together. As I was leaving the room, I said to Victor that I hoped his father would recover. Victor then said to me, "Whatever happens, God will be glorified." That night, Charles Mohr died.

"Whatever happens, God will be glorified." It seems to me that this is the kind of faith that comes from the mountaintop and that sustains us when we take those journeys through life that none of us what to take.