

It might have escaped your notice, but there was a football game last weekend. I can't imagine how it could have escaped your notice. Pittsburghers are generally pretty big football fans. But I know of families in which a passion for football fandom is not equally shared, and that goes double for the biggest game of the year. Even huge football fans think there's just a little too much *hype* associated with the Big Game. I don't even know who came up with the word “hype,” but it seems tailor made for the Big Game. Billions of dollars changed hands during the Big Game. And, by the way, why do advertisements and radio hosts run by brands constantly refer to the Super Bowl as “the Big Game?” Simple: They cannot say “the Super Bowl” unless they pay for that privilege, because it's a registered NFL trademark and has been since 1969. The league also owns the term “Super Sunday.” I think this has really gotten out of hand, don't you?

I noticed the pregame show begins at 1:00 pm but the actual game doesn't start until after 6:30 pm. Is that really necessary? There hasn't been a day in the last month when there wasn't some mention of the game. The hyperbole is rampant on the sports pages and even on front pages. Super Sunday (Oops! The Big Game) has leaked into the “real news” sections. That's when even sports fans have to sit up and say, “Wait a minute! Maybe we've blown things out of proportion. Maybe we've gone a little crazy.” Do you think? It seems excessive, to say the least.

We Christians tend to be a quieter sort. The over-the-top kind of display and big production makes some of us uncomfortable. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; go into the closet to pray; and don't parade your piety. These are the kinds of guidelines by which we live. All the *hype*, all the attention, all the wide-screen technicolor spectacle, makes some of us uneasy. That might be why the Transfiguration has never been very popular with most Christians.

Maybe it's a weak connection, but you've got to admit, the production values on that mountain top were pretty spectacular. Three of the four gospels record this scene, though there are subtle differences in the telling. Yet the clear implication is that there is something important going on here. There is some message, some insight, some understanding that we need to glean from the light show recorded in these verses. Jesus, who comes off like a sensible Savior, most of the time, all of a sudden pulls out all the stops and goes for the glitz, for the big show, the Super Sunday, if you will. It seems out of character somehow. So, what's it about? Let's find out together.

Of course, we would never think that it's too over the top because it is *in the Bible* and therefore *must be important*. Most of the time we just ignore it. But what if we just went with it for a while? What if we filed into the stands and got our popcorn and nachos and watched the show? What would we see?

Well, one of the first questions must be, "Who is this for?" Are we looking over Jesus' shoulder as he reads a text message from his Father, or is this addressed to us? This question has been debated over the centuries, and there is no clear consensus. No, I take that back. The consensus is *Yes!* There is an element that is clearly a message for Jesus and serves as an important part of his march toward Jerusalem that takes over the rest of the gospel story. But this is more of a pep talk, a half-time speech, from the coach and assistant coaches—Moses and Elijah—in this case. Don't ask me to figure out who is the defensive coordinator and who is the quarterback coach. Some metaphors aren't meant to stretch that far! What we do know is who the Head Coach is, of course, and he has a speaking part—"*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*"—which clearly shows there is another component that is a message for Jesus' disciples, which means it's for us too.

The quote is twofold. Part One: "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,*" which is a statement of authority and approval. If the lightshow wasn't enough, now we have an announcement on the public address system. That announcement is that Jesus participates in the divinity of God. Part Two

is: “*Listen to him.*” It’s that second part that Peter kind of messed up. There he is with his foam finger (Jesus is #1) And his face painted in Jesus colors (I don’t know what Jesus colors would be—maybe blood red) And Peter chimes in, “I wanna be your personal trainer, Jesus!” Okay, maybe that’s a stretch, but he was trying to contribute to the team by going up on that mountain with Jesus. He could have been trying to stake a claim, to reinforce his confession, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,*” that he made at Caesarea Philippi in the previous chapter, by setting up a tent, or a tabernacle, to contain the glory of God in this moment. The problem was, he couldn’t contain the glory of God. No one can. This was the Father’s moment. This was Jesus’ moment to shine like the sun. It was a little presumptuous of Peter to want to cover it with a tent. His job was to stand, or kneel, or fall on his face in awe and wonder—which he finally did manage to do.

Growing up in Greenville, PA my family and I went to the Jordan Theater on Shenango Street close to the pediatrician’s office—on special occasions. We never went on Sundays, of course, and unlike the multiplexes of today, the Jordan had only one screen. They showed new movies and old movies at the Jordan. The three that I remember best were “Gone with the Wind,” “Mary Poppins,” and “The Sound of Music.” Those of you with at least a bit of gray in your hair remember those films too. It was quite an experience to see a film on the big screen. But the best part of going to the Jordan Theater, the part we didn’t dare miss, was the “*Previews of Coming Attractions.*” The previews provided just enough of the story line to whet our appetites to come back. They gave us a window into what would be coming to the theater next.

At the risk of mixing metaphors, the story of the Transfiguration of Christ is not only the biblical version of Super Bowl Sunday, but it’s the biblical equivalent of Friday night at the Jordan Theater. It’s a *preview of coming attractions*—for things like Jesus’ resurrection. His face shines like the sun, Matthew tells us, and his clothes become dazzling white, like Easter morning.

Jesus is glorified right before the eyes of Peter, James, and John as he communes with Moses and Elijah.

Previews, unfortunately, don't last long by their very nature. If they lasted longer they would be full-length movies. But then again, this is one of the Bible's genuine mountaintop experiences, and as we all know from experience our mountaintop experiences don't usually last very long. Every once in a while, a moment comes along that we wish we could freeze-frame for all eternity. It's the kind of experience that reaches into our bones and touches our heart with a special feeling. We wish it would last forever. But it doesn't.

This story also raises questions, and my guess is that many of us have been a bit puzzled by it. For one thing, we simply don't know what to do with it. For example, how does Peter know that Jesus is talking with Elijah and Moses? Are they wearing name tags? I doubt he ever saw their photographs in the synagogue library. How does Peter know? And where would he go to get three tents? Did he carry them around? Was there a sporting goods store nearby?

But that's not the point, is it? To understand at least something of the point we have to consider this story in its context. Just prior to it, in Matthew chapter 16, Peter professed his faith in Jesus, but then gets into some big-time trouble with Jesus. His Master told the disciples what will happen to him in Jerusalem, that he will be tried, will suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, will be killed, and on the third day will be raised to life. So how does Peter react? He rebukes Jesus, that is, he scolds him, and tells him those things could never happen to him. For his effort, Jesus calls Peter Satan and lets him know he is not a Rock upon which the church will be built but, a stumbling block, an obstacle to the very will of God.

It is right after this that the Transfiguration occurs. Notice Peter's response. Does he turn to James and John and say, "Look fellas, the last time I spoke to Jesus he nearly took my head off. Why don't you guys take the lead on this one?" No. He doesn't want to give up his position as the spokesman for the

disciples, but he's not exactly full of bravado either. For once, Peter doesn't come across like Sylvester Stallone.

This makes me think that our first responsibility, like Peter's, is to step back and acknowledge and worship Jesus for who he is. We are awestruck (at least, when we're really paying attention) by the wonder and the glory and the awesomeness of God in Christ. Humbly falling to our knees, or singing our sincere praises, or lifting our hearts in joy, or getting filled with compassion, is what we do in worship.

I love that word "compassion." The literal meaning is to feel passion "with." The first syllable "com" means "with," so we are to feel passion "with." Our worship should do more than just give us a warm feeling inside. It should transform us to shine like the sun as we bring light and life to those around us. Our family, our neighbors, our coworkers should know that we have met Jesus in worship, and they will see in us a deep desire to *listen* to Jesus.

It didn't last very long—this trip up on a high mountain that Peter, James and John took with Jesus—but we still commemorate it. Why? Because it points to that which is eternal. Epiphanies are like that. They may not last terribly long, but their significance remains. Sunday morning worship is a brief time to hear once again God's call to serve, to love, to give ourselves away. Worship is all about Jesus as God's Son, the beloved, and about us as the ones drawn together in community and given the privilege to listen to him—really listen.

It doesn't take long for many life experiences to happen. They tend to be brief because they are *previews* of what is yet to come. But if we allow these brief experiences, these *previews* of our life with God that is coming, to teach us what life is all about now, we will listen much more closely. Reflecting on God's presence with us will also lend significance to what happens in these few moments that we are together each Sunday.

I suspect you saw this coming, but what it means for followers of Jesus is that every Sunday is a *Super Sunday*. Amen.