

# “So you think you can preach!”

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Reality TV shows are a huge thing, most everyone watches something. According to National Geographic research, 750 reality TV shows aired on cable in 2015, that’s right 750! Our president was a reality TV star. There are even several church reality shows apparently, “It takes a church,” and “So you think you can preach!” What do you watch? In the past, Yn. Anna and I have watched Shark Tank, and we still watch a Chef’s Life and the Great British Baking show. These shows aren’t all bad and some are much better than the others. But the lowest of them (i.e., Keeping up with the Kardashians) reveal something of the lowest of our human nature, namely that we all want to seem more glorious than, in reality, we are. Because if you think about it, many reality shows have nothing to do with reality; for instance the bachelor. 20 females that look like swimsuit models compete for one man. Is this part of your reality? What the worst of these shows have in common is not reality, but what our egos wish we were. The Kardashians lives appear always glorious, glamorous and interesting. This drives ratings, which sells advertisements, which sell products. Because we, in turn, want to be glorious like the stars, we buy their make-up, shoes, diet pills, etc. The worst of the reality TV genre capitalizes on this deep, but dubious human need we all have to want to be-to appear to be-more glorious than we are.

Today’s feast of the Transfiguration has something to say about our obsessive need for glory and the cure to this disease. On the surface, though, we might think that Jesus was the original glory-seeking reality star. In today’s reading, Jesus appeared transfigured in bright lights and glory to his disciples on a mountaintop, flanked by Biblical superstars Moses and Elijah. Did Jesus have the same publicity seeking flaw we have? Well the Biblical text actually answers that question in the negative. For immediately after Jesus shined in glory to his apostles-giving a momentary glimpse of who he truly was-he tells them to keep quiet about it. “As they were coming down the mountain,” we read in the Gospels, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Jesus, you see, never clamored for his own glory or publicity. He never wanted a palace, never wore silks, never got his face engraved on any money. He told his friends he could teach them about God and their own eternal value. For a text, he used the fish in their nets, the sheep in their fields and the seeds farmers sowed. He did not keep company with the elites, who would bring him fame, but with the downtrodden and outcast, who brought him scorn.

And one day, on a high mountain with Peter, James and John, he appeared to them to be shining in light. And they heard the voice of God calling him the Beloved. The thing is, he never asked them to see his glory. Instead he asked them to see his willingness to suffer, and his presence among the lowliest of them, as signs of the places to which God is drawn. The glory they saw in him was a thing he wanted to keep quiet about.

Unlike the Kardashians, who can’t get enough of the glory road, who want gold on everything and creature comforts all around them, Jesus says hush to Peter and the others, and, he says, let’s go back down, to the low places in this world. Most of us want to rise. We want to be celebrated, and we admire those who are. Peter wanted the same. He wanted to build a temple to capture the greatness of his friend the prophet Jesus, build up his fame, bring pilgrims out to pay homage. The disciples dreamed of glory-to-come. But Jesus didn’t. The only glory Jesus dreamt was the glory of the cross, when “the Son of Man [is] raised from the dead.”

The glory of God does not look like the glory of this world. And all the endorsements, fame and applause that we seek cannot turn real glory into fool’s gold. Today on the feast of the transfiguration of the Lord, let’s all be careful not to pray for the wrong things in our lives. Peter, like most of us, would have made that mistake, there on the high place. He might have prayed that Jesus become the greatest and most powerful leader the world has seen. He might have prayed that Jesus’ followers, the church, might become the greatest religious movement the world has seen. And in many ways, his prayers were answered. But then and now, Jesus gently chastises Peter, and all of us with him, that the ultimate reality is not self-glory, but the self-giving nature of Christ himself, who beckon us to give our whole selves to God and to the service of others. This is a reality whose shine is not seen in the gold of this world, but is transfigured in the light from the heavens above, now and always; amen.

-Parts of this sermon adapted from Nancy Rockwell’s “Real Glory versus Public Foolery”