

Rev Sally's Sermon
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Have you ever noticed that people are often drawn to things that they think reveal the presence of God.? Sometimes you hear about a crying Madonna statue or some other sign in which people see the presence of God. Many years ago, I saw such a sign. I was serving a parish in Dublin Ga. There was a news report that a couple of counties over, there was a house, that miraculously, had the image of Jesus on its outside wall. So, one night, my Education for Ministry class decided to make a pilgrimage to see for ourselves.

We piled into an R.V and after driving 40 minutes through the Georgia countryside, we arrived at our destination. As we pulled up to the house, I looked out the window and saw it. I saw the face of Jesus. We piled out of the R.V. and made our way toward the house. On the side of the house was a shadow, which looked strangely like a face. As I stood and looked at the shadow, I was astonished at how much it did look like a bearded face, much like the face traditionally ascribed to Jesus. Rationally I could tell that the shadow was formed by a security light that cast a shadow on the house through a tree. But despite that logical explanation, I was strangely moved by the image.

So were many others. That night there were about 40 gathered in small groups around the house. But for weeks, many others had come to witness this sight. On some nights, hundreds of people came. This sight moved people to this place. But why? You might ask. I think it's because people long to know the presence of God.

In today's gospel from John, we hear two stories about people experiencing the presence of God through the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was with his disciples along the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd gathered. They wanted to know more about Jesus. They had heard about the miracles he'd done. And now they wanted to see for themselves. But they were out in the country and there were no grocery stores or restaurants. The place was desolate. "Where are we going to buy bread for all these people?" Jesus asked. The disciples were surely floored when he said that. They weren't planning to feed the people. There were thousands. "Even if we had six months' pay, we couldn't feed these people!" Phillip exclaimed. Then

Andrew proclaimed, “Hey, there’s a boy over here with five barley loaves and two fish! But that’s nothing for all these people.” But Jesus told the disciples to make the people sit down on the grass, all 5000 of them. Jesus took the little bit of food, five small loaves and two fish, thanked God for them and then distributed them to the people himself. People ate and ate, as much as they wanted. When they were full, Jesus told the disciples to gather up all that was left over, 12 baskets full.

That evening, the disciples got into a boat to cross the sea of Galilee. It was dark and Jesus was not with them. A strong wind blew up and the sea became rough. They rowed hard and had gone 3 or 4 miles when Jesus came to them walking on the water. They were terrified. Can you imagine? Seeing a man walking on top of the deep sea? What they saw made no sense to their minds. But in the midst of their terror, Jesus spoke. “It is I; do not be afraid.” In that moment those disciples knew something new about Jesus. They knew that he wasn’t like them. They knew that he wasn’t just a wise teacher. They knew that he wasn’t just a gift prophet. Jesus called out to his disciples and said, “It is I”. These words can also be translated “I am”. These are the same words that God used when he identified himself to Moses in the burning bush. In that moment they knew that God was with them. And when Jesus got into the boat, the disciples had what they needed. They arrived safely at the shore.

These two stories are about grace and glory. In the first story the people were hungry. Jesus knew their need – physical and spiritual. He provided what they need. He had compassion on his people and gave them what their bodies need. This was grace. But as he provided for them, God’s glory was also revealed. God’s presence was made known. Because physical food wasn’t the only thing these people needed. They needed God’s presence in their lives.

In the second story, the disciples again experienced the glory of God in Jesus. On that water Jesus revealed the majesty and power of God Almighty, the master of the elements. That is why they were terrified. As he walked across the stormy sea, Jesus defied all that they knew about this world. But even as he displayed the power of God, as he joined them in the boat, he provided what they needed most, a safe arrival at shore.

God’s grace and God’s glory are still with us today. There are times when God provides what we need for life. This is God’s grace. There are times

when we know God's presence with us. This is God's glory. I do believe that there are times when God reveals his grace and glory in mysterious unexplainable ways, sometimes called miracles. But I also believe that God provides his grace and glory in more ordinary experiences. Perhaps it's when we hear a word of Holy Scripture, and it provides guidance to our lives. Perhaps it's as we give thanks for the safe arrival home after a difficult journey. Perhaps it's through the hands of a family member or a friend when you're in need. I know recently, I experienced the grace and the glory of God through family and friends who helped care for me following surgery.

God's grace and glory. We can't fully explain them. But we can keep our eyes open and our hearts alert. Look for God's grace. Look for God's glory. They are with us. They are present in our midst. And when we open our lives to receive God's gifts, our lives will be transformed, transformed with the life of God.