

Glimpses of glory: Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Exodus 24:12-18

I'm less inclined that some commentators are to condemn Peter.

by [Christian Coon](#) in the [January 29, 2008](#) issue

Kurt Vonnegut, the renowned writer and self-avowed humanist, once said that his epitaph should read, "The only proof he ever needed of the existence of God was music." I wonder if Vonnegut had been listening to Franz Jackson; hearing Jackson on the saxophone would inspire such a statement.

Although not everyone has heard of Jackson, he is widely known in Chicago jazz circles. I know him because for more than 35 years he and a group of musicians known as the Dixie Stompers have conducted a Mardi Gras service at my church on Transfiguration Sunday. Jackson has always been the chief draw; he's known for his gift of creating soulful music with his saxophone, especially his rendition of "What a Wonderful World."

Jackson might have been the reason Ken joined my church. Ken is a big jazz buff; when he learned about Jackson's connection to this service, he was thrilled. On Transfiguration Sunday last year, he carefully selected two of his many Jackson albums and brought them to church so Jackson could sign them. Ken arrived about 45 minutes early, sat in a front pew and clutched the albums as he waited to experience Franz Jackson live. My heart sank that day. For the first time in the history of our Mardi Gras service, Jackson didn't play. (He's 95 now, and not always able to get out.) Ken was disappointed; he'd had glimpses of glory in listening to Jackson, but he had hoped for more.

Peter could probably relate. In Matthew 16, to Jesus' delight, Peter proclaims Jesus the Messiah, Son of the living God. Not long after that, to Jesus' dismay, Peter argues that a suffering and dead messiah does no one any good. His comment leads Jesus not only to rebuke Peter but also to instruct his followers about the nature of discipleship and the nature of who he is. There may be suffering and death, he tells them, but the Son of Man will come again in glory. Then Jesus leads Peter, James and

John up a high mountain, à la Moses in Exodus, to give them a glimpse of the glory he described.

And what a glimpse! Their teacher and leader is transformed. Moses and Elijah are also part of the vision. But this transfiguration is only a glimpse. Peter may have thought it was more than that; he wanted to honor it somehow, to linger in this glory, to make it permanent by building dwellings. Some commentators have harsh words for Peter's desire to build, calling it a "serious mistake" and "foolish." I'm less inclined to condemn Peter—surely that one glimpse was worthy of celebration and commemoration!

But when this Christophany turns into a theophany, Jesus turns to the disciples and reminds them that this moment is more than a spectacular light show. His instructions are simple: They must *listen* to Jesus if they want to get the complete picture. Listen to him say that they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. Listen to him describe the glory that will follow when his ministry and life on earth are complete. What they have experienced is only a glimpse.

But don't underestimate the impact of a glimpse on a person who's trying to see the whole picture, to get her arms around what it means to follow Jesus. It certainly had an effect on the author of 2 Peter, who recounted this incident in detail:

. . . we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

Glimpses of glory tend to stick in one's soul and pierce the deepest fog.

Jim was another man in my church who loved jazz. Jim is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, so he and his wife made a difficult move three years ago, from their home of 40 years into an apartment. I don't have a lot of experience in being with those who have dementia or Alzheimer's, but I know enough to be patient, to listen to the stories told again and again, and to encourage some with Alzheimer's to talk about the things they remember. I was trying to do these things the first time I visited them—until his wife mentioned that he loves his records and that she had been unable to hook up her stereo (a receiver and a turntable). I made the connections,

she found some albums, and suddenly I heard a sound I hadn't heard for 20 years—the pop of the turntable arm and the soft hisses and scratches of a needle on vinyl. The sounds of Benny Goodman's clarinet were coming through the speakers. Jim was transformed. He listened intently to the clarinet, horns and piano, wincing slightly when the needle hit a scratch, but mostly beaming (transfigured?) as he closed his eyes and swayed back and forth. He was experiencing glimpses of glory, music as proof of the existence of God.

I wanted to build a shelter for Jim and his wife so they could permanently live in that moment, but the record ended. Jim's foretaste was enough for him on that day, and it was a glimpse that continues to help me as I celebrate God's glory and try to understand what it means to follow Jesus as I come down the mountain. I was an eyewitness to majesty. For me, it was proof of the existence of God.