

## It Is Good For Us To Be Here – Luke 9:28-36

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ February 10, 2013

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Have you seen it on the news? It’s a disease that is spreading its way across our nation, and even the world. You can’t prevent this disease by getting a vaccination, you can’t prevent this disease by taking your vitamins in the morning. Perhaps one of the only ways you can’t contract this disease is if you are already dead. So what is this dreadful disease that we should be wary about? It is the dreaded foot-in-mouth disease.

Is this a disease that you have had before? (Not to be confused with hand-foot-mouth disease) Foot-in-mouth disease is something that anyone can have whether you’re young or old, male or female, smart or not so smart. It’s a disease that happens when you stick your foot in your mouth. OK, I’m joking a little bit here, it’s not a disease you get when you stick your literal foot in your mouth. It’s a turn of phrase that describes a time when you said something you wish you could take back. Like when you ask a woman when the baby is due and she isn’t even pregnant. You were dumb enough to stick your foot in your mouth, before you thought about what you said.

The apostle Peter certainly experienced it during his three years learning from Jesus. He was headstrong, always acting before he thought, and there were times when he just should have stuck his foot in his mouth instead of talking. This morning we hear about such a time that Peter said something without thinking. It was when he had just seen Jesus’ glory and he wanted that moment to last forever, so he began by saying, MASTER, IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE. And in this transfiguration account we see two things:

1. We’re not in heaven yet
2. God points us to him who is the way

I guess we really can't blame Peter for sticking his foot in his mouth on that mountain. He was excited, he was headstrong, it was an awesome experience, he wanted the moment to last forever. It's something that perhaps any of us might have done if we were put in the shoes of Saint Peter. It was a moment like none other in all of human history, so let's review what prompted Peter to say something he didn't think about.

Even though Peter, James and John were disciples, they didn't have a clear picture of who Jesus really was or what the Messiah had come to do. Just a week before this, Peter had rebuked Jesus for saying the Messiah had to die. This didn't fit his picture. This trip up the mountain was, in part, to show them and us that God's Messiah was stronger than anything they could imagine, he was God himself, and death would not be the end. He went up this mountain to pray, and also to reveal his glory to his disciples, to give them a clear glimpse that he was the Messiah, and that he did know what he was talking about.

And up on that mountain he was transfigured, he was transformed, he was changed before them. **"His face changed** (it became as bright as the sun) **and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."** Think about that for a minute, what that looks like. Look at the front cover of your worship folder, or on the screen – these pictures don't do the transfiguration justice. I brought a flashlight up here to demonstrate. Do you want to get an idea of what Jesus looked like on that mountain? Then look directly into this flashlight, or when you leave church this morning, look into the sun. OK, I'm not actually suggesting you look into the sun, but you get the point. The disciples had to shield their eyes from the glory they were seeing come from Jesus, because it was the glory of God.

And Jesus was not alone. There appeared beside him two figures – Moses and Elijah. Two towers of the Old Testament, who were talking with Jesus, talking about his journey to come, his exodus to Jerusalem. It was a sight unlike any in the world had ever seen. It was God, pulling back the cloak of humanity to reveal his deity. This sight was a glory to behold. And Peter wanted it to continue. Before the two figures left, he spoke up, **"MASTER, IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE. Let us put up three shelters."** The part that I find funny is the parenthetical insert right after those words, **"He did not know what he was saying."**

So what about Peter's words were so out of place? We are not denying that IT WAS GOOD FOR THEM TO BE THERE. We all would have loved to be there. What Peter was reminded of, although in not so many words, was that we're not in heaven yet. It was true, this was a glimpse of heaven for Jesus' disciples, similar to the vision of heaven given to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos (where he wrote the book of Revelation). But on this side of the grave, this vision of heaven was not to last. For the glories of heaven cannot come down and find shelter in this world of sin.

This vision of heaven was only temporary. For shortly after the vision the disciples would go down the mountain with Jesus and it would be life as usual. They would be reminded that people disliked Jesus, they were reminded of the sick and hurting that Jesus was constantly healing. They would be surrounded by death, and eventually the death of their Lord and Master. In a simple word, they were reminded of the sin that poisons this world. They weren't in heaven yet.

And neither are we. Oh sure, sometimes it may seem like it at times, when we are surrounded by an earthly “high.” A time that we want to extend forever. Perhaps it was on a first date, or a graduation party, winning the lottery or winning the Superbowl. Perhaps our highs have been of a more spiritual nature. I can remember one Reformation service I attended back in Wisconsin where I was one of thousands singing the praises of our Lord. That was awesome! Maybe the moments we might want to capture happen right here at church, when we are gathered around God’s Word and sacraments with other believers, and we know when we get home we will be surrounded by bickering children and the pressures of work. IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE.

And as much as we would love for these moments to last, we know that they won’t, we know that they can’t. That’s because we’re not in heaven yet. We know that first date has to end, the high of your team winning the Superbowl will go away, that special service has to end, and we come to the reality, we’re not in heaven yet. Life goes on. We come down from that physical, emotional, spiritual high to be reminded of what living on earth is all about.

Living on earth, even as a believer in Christ is not the same as life will be in heaven. Life is not a bed of roses, it will not always be filled with success upon success. There will be lows that accompany the highs. But this is not proof that you’re an unbeliever, it’s not proof that God has abandoned you, it is proof that you are living on earth. There will be times your body feels like it’s falling apart, when you feel emotionally drained, when materially you don’t have as much as you wish you had. All of this is a reminder that we are not before God’s presence in heaven.

Do we wish that we could always be before God? Certainly, we echo Peter’s words, MASTER IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE. And one of the big reasons why this can’t last forever, at least on this side of the grave, is because of who we are. There is nothing wrong with the transfiguration moment, there is something wrong with us. His glory is too much for us. Just as we can’t look up at the sun without blinding our eyes, we can’t look into the face of a holy God with unholy eyes because of our sin. In another gospel it reveals that the disciples became terrified at this event. It’s because they weren’t in heaven yet.

(2)

But even though we aren’t in heaven yet, this event gives Christians the direction to look for how to get to heaven. While Peter was speaking, a cloud came over the mountain, covering the disciples, covering Jesus, covering Moses and Elijah. And a voice came from this cloud, it was the voice of God himself. **“This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him.”** God broke into human history in an event like this two years earlier. God spoke out at Jesus’ baptism, something we celebrated at the beginning of the Epiphany season. And now, as we close the season of Epiphany, God speaks out once again.

In this message we have three important phrases: **“This is my Son”** – God’s Son. **“Whom I have chosen”** – chosen to save the world from their sins. **“Listen to him”** – listen to what he has to tell you. How often had Jesus’ disciples seen him as a lowly despised man? From his appearance he certainly didn’t look like he was anything special. But that’s just the way God works. This was God’s Son, clothed in all majesty, which is his by right. It is this man, who is also God, whom God points us to. God points us to him who is the way.

It was this account that Peter had in mind when he wrote in his letter, **“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”** These words you have before you in the gospel of Luke, or anywhere in Holy Scripture are more than just cleverly invented stories, they are actual accounts of people who saw God’s power at work. It is a record of God’s plan to save sinners, sinners like you and me.

God points us to him who is the way in his Word. The listening that Jesus’ disciples have done is something that we are called upon to do today. And this listening takes on two parts. One is more passive in nature, and the other is more active. We listen to God’s Word and hear what he has done for us. It takes no action on our part. We just hear the Savior’s accomplished mission, he has earned heaven for us, and believe. You might call it passive – we didn’t do anything, Christ did everything. The other listening that we do is more active in nature. It is our response to the first listening. A natural result of being a Christian is to ask: “What can I do to serve my God?” We listen to his Son.

God points us to his Word as the means of getting to heaven. And there is no part of God’s Word, or God’s law that is unimportant. There is no part that we can just arbitrarily decide to interpret differently because it doesn’t fit with my belief. God’s Word gives us his plan of salvation and tells us how we can live in response to his love. We want to listen to his Word. It is this listening that believers are doing all the time – in church on Sundays, when you regularly open God’s Word at home in devotions, we are listening when we be the best neighbor we can be, the best husband or wife, the best worker or student.

It was certainly good for Jesus’ disciples to be there on that transfiguration mount. It was a glimpse of heaven, but only a glimpse. It would be this event that would encourage the disciples to press on. To press on as Jesus made the difficult and painful journey to Jerusalem to accomplish the will of the Father. As Christians, we also press on in our lives through those difficult times. We join Jesus on his journey to the cross this upcoming Lenten season, and look forward to his triumph over it, when we can say with all the saints, MASTER, IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE! Amen.