

TRANSFIGURATION - 2013 GLORY REVEALED

Our text for Transfiguration Sunday is the assigned Gospel. From Luke chapter 9 we listen again to these verses:

²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

Dear Friends in Christ,

TRANSFIGURATION. Now there's a word you don't hear every day. In fact, other than this one day out of the church year, you might never hear the word at all. "Transfiguration" is a change in form or appearance, a glorifying, or spiritual change." Needless to say, Transfiguration is not something you see happen everyday. But one Sunday a year, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, we set aside to talk about a Transfiguration that happened 2000 years ago. It was a time when Jesus revealed his glory to three of his disciples. Not only what they saw but also what they heard that day is important to us 2000 years later.

What an occasion it was for Peter, James, and John. Here they were, Jesus' "inner circle" of disciples, headed up onto a high mountain with Jesus to pray. This was not unusual for Jesus. We read in the Gospels that Jesus would often separate himself from the crowds, even separate himself from his disciples, to provide a time for solitude and prayer. But this time it was very different. Verse 29, *As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.* One moment, Jesus looked like he always did to the disciples, one of them, a man of flesh and blood. The next thing they saw, Jesus was transfigured. The appearance of his face changed, Matthew's gospel tells us that *his face shone like the sun.* (Matthew 17:2).

What was the meaning of this? Why did Jesus appear as a bright light? Jesus was in fact revealing his divine glory. Remember in our first reading this morning about Moses? (Exodus 34:29-35). The glory of the Lord God is radiant. And because Moses was in the presence of the Lord, his face also became radiant. Jesus was here revealing his true glory to these three chosen witnesses, and his true glory was radiant because he, too, is divine and holy.

Up to this point in His ministry Jesus had kept his glory hidden. Jesus set aside his glory when he came to earth and lived among us. Oh, from time to time he would give a glimpse or two of his power and majesty, restoring sight to the blind, making the lame walk, controlling the forces of nature with just a word, raising the dead back to life. But most of the time Jesus kept his glory hidden.

Some say that the Transfiguration event was a miracle. Actually, when you think about it, the Transfiguration event was the brief cessation of what was otherwise a constant, thirty-three year miracle. The miracle was that Christ didn't always shine with the brilliance of his glory, he kept it hidden. Years later John, one of the three witnesses wrote, . . . *We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Begotten . . .* (John 1:14). They had no doubt who Jesus was now. The transfiguration revealed Jesus as

the divine Son of God and Savior of the world. It was the ultimate epiphany, the ultimate revelation of Jesus as God and Savior.

The first part of this three-part event was Jesus revealing his glory. That led to the second part of the Transfiguration. Remember, up to this point, the only people on that mountain were Jesus, Peter, James, and John. Verses 30 & 31, *Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.* Now, out of nowhere, Elijah and Moses appeared. Just think about the message that God was sending by having Elijah and Moses stand there with Jesus. Elijah had left the earth 650 years earlier. Moses had been “dead” (humanly speaking) for over a thousand years. The fact that these two Old Testament heroes of the faith were standing there and talking told the disciples and it tells us: There is LIFE after DEATH! These heroes of the faith really did exist - and they still exist to this day. They didn’t look all wrinkled or shriveled or decayed or decomposed. They appeared in “glorious splendor.” God’s promise of life after death is true!

Verse 13 *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.* Moses and Elijah knew exactly what Jesus was about to do, to depart this world from Jerusalem. This is of course was a reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about God’s plan of salvation which required the death of Jesus. Now if I were in Peter, James, or John’s shoes that day, I’d be a bit confused by everything that was going on, especially if I were Peter, and especially in light of what had happened a few days earlier.

You see, about eight days earlier, Peter had answered Jesus’ question of “who do you say that I am?” with the bold confession “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then began to teach the disciples that “*the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priest, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*” (Luke 9:22). Peter didn’t want to hear this kind of talk, so he pulled Jesus aside and started to rebuke Jesus, saying, “This won’t happen to you. Messiahs don’t suffer and die, they bring us victory and glory. So Jesus, this talk about dying and suffering, it isn’t gonna happen to you, not if I have anything to say about it.” But Jesus had replied “*Get behind me, Satan! . . . You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*” (Matthew 17:23). Ouch. Talk about being put in your place.

I wonder if Peter was still smarting from that rebuke when he saw all of this unfold right before his very eyes. He saw this glorious event take place, the light radiating from Jesus, Moses and Elijah’s presence there, and he thought “Boy, it doesn’t get any better than this. Now this is what I was talking about the other day, Jesus!” Out of a desire to keep that glory there as long as he could, he said v.33, “*It is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*” Whatever was going on up there on that mountaintop that day, it’s something that Peter wanted to have last as long as possible. Maybe he thought that by setting up shelters, he could persuade Moses and Elijah to stay with Jesus for a while so that he could keep this glorious activity going. Maybe Peter thought that he’d better do something to make sure this experience didn’t end. Maybe Peter thought that this was his chance to keep Jesus from suffering and dying.

But then, part three. ³⁴ *While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.* The same cloud that covered Mt. Sinai when Moses went up to receive

the 10 commandments, the same cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt, the same cloud that represented the presence of God himself was there on that mountain. So there's no doubt about the source of the voice that came out of that cloud. It was the voice of God himself. And what did that voice say? Did it say "Great idea, Peter, get to work setting up those shelters, and James, you bring Moses, Elijah, and Jesus some food, they're hungry, and John, you better go and make sure that they have some nice clean sheets for their beds, and everything else they need to be comfortable here." No. The voice did not direct the disciples to what their eyes saw, the voice told them, "*This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.*" The voice directed them to the words Jesus had been speaking to them all along, not the miracles, not the glory of the transfiguration, but Jesus' word. "Listen to him." What are they to be listening to? Well, what's Jesus talking about with Moses and Elijah up there on that mountain? Verse 31 "*They spoke about his (Jesus') departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*" We're right back to what Jesus had been talking about with His disciples eight days earlier.

"Remember that conversation, Peter? Remember what Jesus said and how you responded to it? Remember why Jesus called you Satan? It's being confirmed right here. If you listen to Jesus, Peter, you're hearing Him talk about his upcoming departure, his suffering and death. This HAS to happen, Peter. If you got your way about it, and prevented Jesus from going to the cross, even though you may have the best intentions, you're going to be a roadblock preventing Jesus from going to the cross and saving you from your sins. Peter, the real glory isn't in the things of the world, it's in listening to Jesus, and His Word. And that means Jesus will go to Jerusalem, suffer, and die. But, it's going to be for your good! Listen to Him!"

And then, just as soon as God the Father had instructed those disciples on that mountaintop to "Listen to Him", the experience ended. Moses and Elijah had disappeared. Jesus' appearance was back to what it was before. No more light. No more cloud. No more loud, booming voice from heaven. Just Jesus, Peter, James, and John, making their way down the mountain, and eventually to Jerusalem, where Jesus would suffer, and die, just as He had talked about on that mountain.

So, now the question is, why is this event so important that we hear about it every year? Well, we've seen two important truths so far. First of all, in the Transfiguration Jesus showed he is divine. He possesses the same glory, the same radiant glory as God the Father. This is important, because the Savior we need has to be both True God and True Man. Secondly we've already seen, by the appearance of Moses and Elijah, that temporal, physical death is not the end of the line. We continue to exist even after this life ends. (John 11:25-26). But more important is the instruction from God the Father, "*This is my Son . . . Listen to him.*"

In his Word, Christ tells us that he is the one who gives us the one thing we need most in life, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. He did so by doing exactly what he talked about with Moses and Elijah up on that mountain. He went to Jerusalem, suffered many things, was rejected, despised, spit upon, and sentenced to death on a cross. As Jesus hung on the cross, he didn't look very glorious in the eyes of the world. For Peter, James, and John, when they saw Jesus hanging there, bleeding and dying, this Transfiguration moment would seem so irrelevant and so far away. But because they listened to Jesus, they eventually realized that the sight of Jesus on the cross is the most glorious sight there will be. They came to know that sight is the sight of Jesus defeating the power of sin, death, and the devil for all the world for all of time. And so, you and I today, continue to see the true glory of Jesus revealed not in the

things of this world, not in our own experiences, or emotions. The true glory of Jesus is revealed to us through His Word. "Listen to Him!"

I know many of you have real problems, real issues in life. With the continuing uneasy economic situation, maybe some of you here this morning might even wonder if you're going to have the same job 6 months from now, or if you'll be able to keep a roof over your head. Some of you are wondering if you're ever going to be able to make it to retirement. Those of you who are retired might wonder if you're going to be able to keep paying the bills. If you're a high school student planning on going off to college, you're wondering if the money will be there for you to go or not. If you're a college student you might be starting to panic about the ever-growing student loan debt. If you're an adult child of aging parents, you worry about those who once took care of you, as you watch their health deteriorate. Just turn on any of the news channels on TV, or pick up a newspaper, and what do you see? Continuing violence in the middle east. Missing, kidnaped or murdered children. A dangerous fugitive on the loose. There are real problems, real issues confronting us all. And then there are those health issues, yours, your loved ones.

What do you think would happen in your life if you took the time to really listen to Jesus, to hear him in his Word? How do you think you'd handle the crises and the threats and the frightful uncertainties in life if you spent time each day listening to Jesus, listening to his Word and his promises? You'd have reason to be less fearful. In his Word he says, "*I am your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear. I will help you.'*" (Isaiah 41:13). You'd have reason to be less threatened, less confused by other voices. Just think how much more peaceful your life might be if your heart was tuned to the voice of him who says, "*My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life.*" As you listen to him, you hear Jesus tell you that he is the way, the truth, and the life. You need look no farther. He says to you, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"

This year in our Midweek Lenten services, we will follow Jesus on the journey that he talked about on the Mount of Transfiguration. We will see him *suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law*. We will see him falsely accused, beaten, mocked, and crucified. I would encourage each and every one of you to carve out the time on Wednesdays and sit here, and listen to your Savior tell you how much He loves you. Follow the instruction of God the Father on that Mountain. "Listen to Him." You will hear what Jesus has done for you on the cross. You will hear again how Jesus died so that you might live.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

On the Mt. of Transfiguration Jesus revealed his divine, radiant glory as proof that his is True God as well as True Man. Give us the will to listen to him more and more and hear his message of love and pardon, and sins forgiven. Strengthen us through your Word to be able to stand strong and secure in time of crisis. And use us to spread the message of salvation to those still in darkness that your kingdom may be advanced and your will done in us. Amen.