

EYEWITNESSES OF GLORY

Our text for Transfiguration Sunday is the Epistle Lesson. From 2 Peter chapter 1, we listen again to verse 16.

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.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are coming to the end of the Epiphany Season. An epiphany is a manifestation, or a revelation about something or someone. In the Epiphany Season we have heard how Jesus was manifested or revealed to be the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, Immanuel - God with us. Epiphany reaches a high point with Transfiguration Sunday. What we recall on this special Sunday is the ultimate epiphany, the ultimate manifestation of Jesus Christ as God and Lord. He was transfigured, that is, he was transformed from his normal human form to reveal himself in all his glory. Today's text allows us to see that same glory of Jesus. We see the glory of Jesus reported by an eyewitness and revealed by inspiration. We see the very glory of Jesus in the word of God we call the Holy Scriptures – the Bible.

It is a common journalistic standard on TV news programs for a story to be introduced by a news anchor in the studio and then the viewers are taken live to the scene of the news story. There, in the blistering heat, or the pouring rain, or the blowing snow, there is a reporter “on the scene” describing the event and sometimes even interviewing people who saw what happened. This is designed to give you the impression that you have a front row seat to the action, you are seeing events as they happen, and you are supposed to find the reporter more credible, more knowledgeable, more believable about the facts of the event because he or she is right there on the scene, an eyewitness.

That's just what the Apostle Peter is trying to impress on his readers about the Transfiguration of our Lord. “I was there. We were with Jesus on the sacred mountain. This is not a figment of my imagination. This is not a myth or legend that began as a rumor. It is a real event in the life of Jesus,” Peter is telling his readers, “You can believe it. I was there. I saw and heard everything. I was an eyewitness.” Peter is writing to Christians who were suffering persecution, Christians whose faith was being attacked by false teachers who questioned the truthfulness of Peter and the reliability of the Old Testament prophets. Peter assures these believers that their faith is true and correct, and that they can trust the Scriptures for instruction and guidance. Much of what these first century believers were taught came from apostolic eyewitnesses of the events, or from students of the apostles, but all of what they were taught came from God himself, through God's divinely inspired word.

In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, along with the Gospel of Matthew, which was read just a few minutes ago, the Transfiguration event is fleshed out in more detail. Peter, along with James and his brother John, were taken up a high mountain, “Where” Peter says, “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” For one brief moment Jesus shone forth in all the brightness of his majesty and his divinity, all the fullness of the glory which he enjoyed in heaven before he came to earth. The appearance of Jesus' face changed. He radiated light. His clothing became bright. His face shone like the sun. He was **transfigured**. Peter, James and John were permitted to see Jesus in his glory, in the splendor that surrounds him in heaven, the splendor that Jesus set aside to come and live with us.

What an effect the sight of the glorified Christ had on these three disciples! They talked and preached and wrote about this event the rest of their lives. Not only were these three eyewitnesses of glory, they were earwitnesses,

too. All three heard the voice of God the Father say, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* The cloud of glory and the loud voice forcefully proclaimed the Father's love and approval, and greatly strengthened Christ in his determination to go to the cross for sinful mankind.

And suddenly, with the Transfigured Jesus were Moses and Elijah, Moses representing the Old Testament Law, Elijah representing the Old Testament prophets. Everything written in the Old Testament, all the prophecies about a Savior of Mankind, everything was about to be fulfilled in Jesus. The innocent, spotless Lamb of God was approaching the time when he would suffer and die to pay for the sins of the whole world, Moses' sins, Elijah's, Peter, James and John's sins, yours and mine. Jesus talked about this plan for mankind's salvation with Moses and Elijah, God's plan to save us. (From the day mankind fell into sin, God's plan depended on Jesus' crushing of Satan, but it would cost Jesus his life.)

In just a few days the Season of Lent begins. Once again you will hear the accounts of Jesus' suffering and death in detail. On the Mount of Transfiguration it was made clear that the Father's plan to save mankind from the awful, eternal consequences of sin was in place and it was being accomplished. And it could only be accomplished by Jesus.

On your own, you could never stand before a just and holy God who hates sin. Our many sins condemn us from birth. It took God becoming man to accomplish our salvation. But Jesus didn't merely become a human. He took on the form of a servant. He came to serve and to give his life as payment for sin. He went from being God in heaven to the broken, bleeding, beaten figure on the cross who called out, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* He did all this for you, to pay for your sins, so that through faith in him you can have the forgiveness of sins, peace with God and the blessed assurance of eternal life, because God himself has worked your salvation.

And that glory which surrounded Jesus, that majestic light which emanated from him was revealed to the disciples for just a moment to strengthen them. They were headed for troubled times. They needed to see Jesus' glory to prepare them for the deep humiliation of Gethsemane, the degrading and mocking of Jesus by the soldiers, the tortuous execution. Yes, there would be moments when these three disciples would compromise or deny their relationship with Jesus, times when they would run away in the face of danger. But they would never forget the Mount of Transfiguration.

Later on, after they were bold witnesses of the resurrection and ascension, they still wrote about the Transfiguration. John 1:14 (NIV) *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* This event changed their lives. As his disciples, they needed to see Jesus in his glory because they were the ones Jesus chose to spread his message, the ones Jesus appointed to witness to others in a hostile society, they were the ones, the only ones entrusted with the saving good news. Sound familiar? You, as a believer, are also a disciple of Christ. You also are the ones Jesus chose to spread his message, the ones Jesus appointed to witness to others in a hostile society, you are the ones, the only ones, entrusted with the saving good news.

The disciples needed to see Jesus in his glory because they were the ones who would be tempted to doubt God's love, to doubt God's plan, to doubt God's presence and to doubt God's power, to get discouraged, to question the way Jesus chose to get his message out.

I know you, too, are tempted to doubt God's love, to doubt God's plan, to doubt God's presence and to doubt God's power, to get discouraged, to question the way Jesus chose to get his message out. I know that you, too, are being challenged in your Christian faith.

For Peter's readers who were being challenged in their Christian faith, Peter explains that the New Testament witness of the apostles, their sermons, and their letters, and their teachings makes the Old Testament even more certain and together they form a solid and unshakable basis for our faith. Conversely, the testimony of the apostles, their sermons, and their letters, and their teachings were made even more solid by their agreement with and conformity to the solid foundation of the Old Testament scriptures.

¹⁹ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

God's word is the ultimate truth, the ultimate authority.

None of the writers of Scripture had to come up with their own material. The Lord God supplied and controlled the content, using each prophet's own unique vocabulary, style and life situation. Scripture never had its origin or interpretation in the will of man.

Verse 21, ". . . *but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" God the Holy Spirit had the task of bringing words from God to chosen human beings, moving the person to write and supervising the content, so that the finished product may be called the very Word of God.

Today, more than ever, it is vitally important that we value Scripture as the very word of God because the accuracy and truthfulness of the Bible are under attack. The words written down in the pages of Scripture are truly God's words just as the Lord revealed them to be recorded. It is by faith that the Lord has opened our hearts to know, believe, and confess in the glory that is discovered in the word of God. There may be many who reject the truth of the word of God outright. But man's denial does not remove the glory of God from his word of truth. 1 Corinthians 2:13 (NIV) *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.* Love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness are all spiritual words expressing the very spiritual truths of the glory of God's word. As believers we know the word of God is filled with his truth for our lives.

Peter was an eyewitness. He saw Jesus changed before his very eyes on the Mount of Transfiguration. But his testimony was mainly about the voice of God that revealed Jesus as God's Son. This same voice of God still speaks to us today. It is the voice of God that comes alive whenever you hear, read, or study the sacred pages of your Bible. It is on these pages that the Lord God Almighty comes to you and speaks to you. You don't have to climb a mountain and enter into a cloud to see or hear the glory of God, just open your Bible and read. In God's word you can see Jesus in all his glory, you can be an eyewitness of glory. And you can have an eyewitness response in your life.

Our world seems to grow ever darker and ever more hopeless with every passing day. In the midst of hopelessness God's word is our hope. Are you a witness to the hope that you have? In his first letter the Apostle Peter says, ". . . *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. . .*" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). Outside of Christianity people struggle to understand the meaning of life. Why are we here? What does this all mean? Your eyewitness response can lead such a person to God's word where God answers those questions and more.

If today's world cannot see Christ or hear Christ it's in part because believers are failing to be eyewitnesses of Christ's glory. Today's world needs to see and hear Christ. You can talk and talk till you're blue in the face, trying to talk people into Christianity. But no one can argue against the proof of a changed life, a life changed by growth in faith, a life that witnesses the glorified Christ, a life that directs others to God's word. That's an eyewitness response. That's being an eyewitness of glory. Amen.

