

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Transfiguration Sunday
Matthew 17:1-9
January 25th, 2015

The Apostle John wrote, “*Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2).

John got to see Jesus “as He is” in two different ways. First, in the way everyone else saw him: as a human being like the rest of us. He needed sleep and He needed food. He needed the same oxygen to breathe as everyone else. John saw Jesus as a man because that is what He was. Secondly, John saw Jesus as a man who was transfigured – the word in the Greek is “metamorpho” – He was still a man but changed. He was brilliant with brightness. His clothes became white as light. I would imagine there aren’t the right kind of words to adequately describe what John, along Peter and James, saw that faithful day.

But when John wrote the words I just spoke above, he was not talking as much about the way Jesus looks, but rather how we look – “*But we know that when He appears we will be like Him.*” Also, John is talking about the coming again of our Lord on the last day – not some mountain top experience that only a couple others besides him got to see on a special occasion. You see, John knew that what he saw was special – Jesus in all His brilliance along with Moses and Elijah and the “approving” voice of the Heavenly Father – bright clouds and everything. But what is more special is what we will be like on the last day – on the day we go to heaven to meet up with our Lord. Like Luther said, “God is life. Therefore, we too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss.”

Today is the celebration of what is called the Transfiguration of our Lord. And while we are enamored over what Jesus looked like, what Peter, James and John saw on the top of that mountain – Moses and Elijah along with “Holy Smoke” (the bright cloud that overshadowed them), what they heard from the Heavenly Father, and all that would cause any of us to be absolutely amazed and in disbelief, there is so much more to the story than all that. The story of what happened on that holy mount was not just for three men to see the brilliance of God. Rather, it was for the sake of all the children of God – “*We are God’s children now*” – who are transformed “metamorpho” – by a far greater spectacle that will happen on Good Friday. On Good Friday, Jesus isn’t transfigured – you are. And that is the far greater transformation. That is the far greater Good News.

The greater Good News is what Jesus was concerned about as well. That is the reason He told Peter, James and John exactly what they didn’t want to hear. He told them, “*Tell no one... until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.*” That would be the first thing I would want to do when I have experienced something great. I’m sure Peter, James and John would have wanted to take a couple of selfies with Moses and Elijah and post them on Facebook or Instagram. They would want to broadcast to all their friends what special thing they have been a part of so that others could be amazed – maybe even be a tad jealous. Could you imagine if Jesus were to come like this today – in the age of social media – and try to tell three men not to say anything about seeing the greatest of the law and the prophets of the Old Testament and seeing Jesus the way He gleamed and hearing the voice of the Father to not say anything? How do you think that would work out?

Jesus says, “*Tell no one*,” because what they saw on top of that mount was not the greater thing, not the most important event, and not the big story. If they were to post pics from the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, it would have created a great stir. But the more important event would happen yet in the future. Blood instead of brilliance – gore instead of glory – crying and screaming instead of shouting and praising. We are a people of bright lights and amazing sights. Our Lord Jesus is a God of death to life – of suffering to victory.

This is where so many have it wrong in our world today. There is no prosperity that comes from the world that leads to our salvation – no matter how bad we would like for that to happen. There is no brilliant pic, no earthly glory, and no amount of money or fame that will lead to everlasting victory. We are a people of “fame now”. No guts, no glory, no fame no story – we want to go down in history and have our best life right now. We want to be known and remembered. We want our legacy to look like we did it all – had it all – we want others to be impressed when they see a catalog of our life’s accomplishments. We want the Mount of Transfiguration. We want to say, “I was there the day Moses and Elijah came and Jesus ‘metamorpho’ before my very eyes.” We want to say it – that we were there – for all the wrong reasons – to make others feel they missed it – to make others jealous and envious, to make others believe we more significant.

Jesus wouldn’t have it that way. “*Tell no one... until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.*” Nothing will be great enough to overshadow the cross. Not for you, for me, or for anyone. So this day is not the greatest day for the church. This day is a day that leads you and me to a far greater thing – the death of Jesus on the cross. We begin this journey together – from the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, down that mount, living and working among the people with the Good News of far better things to come for all – all the way to that blessed city, to a cross and then to a tomb.

So now, from the time of “*Tell no one*” to the time of the resurrection of the dead, the message of Jesus changes. Today we live in that “post-resurrection” world, so the message has changed. It went from “*Tell no one*” to “tell everyone”. Tell everyone about the Good News of Jesus Christ. We might want to harken back to when Jesus was changed on the Mount of Transfiguration so that we can tell others that we have been changed in a far greater way as we point our neighbor, our co-worker, our family member to what changed them – the blood of Jesus on the cross. The world today is a “tell everyone” world. Make our selfies count. Make sure that your neighbor can see Jesus – you are a “Christian” – when they look not just at your pics but at your life. Show Christ in word and deed. Show Christ and what He did for the sake of those you love – the ones that He loves.

A “Transfigured” Jesus. Wow. A transformed you. Even better. That’s the point. That’s why He came. That’s why the message was “*Tell no one* about this” because that was not the bigger thing. The bigger thing would happen on Calvary and that would be so much more important for you and for me. That would be the work that saves us. That’s what we need most. Not the glory and not the story of seeing great sights on the top of a mountain. But rather hearing just a few words would be better. Jesus said, “*It is finished*” and bowed His head and died. Sounds terrible. But it is what He came to do. And He came to do it for you. Thanks be to God. You have been “transformed” by your “Love you to death” Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.