

## Prepared to Die, Prepared to Live

Luke 9:28-36

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

February 10, 2013 – Transfiguration Sunday



Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today, on this Transfiguration Sunday, we find ourselves – both in terms of God’s Word, and this season of the Church Year – hemmed in, if you will, by the subject of death. In terms of the Church Year, we’re standing on the threshold of the season of Lent – one of the most somber seasons of the year. Lent is when take time to reflect not only on our own sinfulness, but more importantly, on the great price God paid to redeem us from our sin. In terms of today’s Scripture readings, we first have the text from Deuteronomy where the death and burial of Moses is recorded. Then, in the Gospel we find Jesus speaking to His disciples of His impending death. In verse 22 of this same chapter Jesus says: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed.” And then in verse 44 He continues: “**Now** the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.”

So, faced as we are with both the rapidly approaching season of Lent and the context of these two readings, it would be rather difficult to try and escape the subject of death – and indeed, should we, as Christians, be fearful of talking about it? I’m not suggesting you walk about looking like death-warmed-over, wander through life with nothing but death on your lips, or have nothing more to offer the world other than an inescapable aura of doom and gloom. But as Christians should death not be something you’re well acquainted with? Should you not be comfortable speaking of this reality from which none ever escapes? Should you ignore Paul’s words to the Church in Philippi: “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain?”

Somewhere in our history there’s been a major shift in the minds of most people concerning what the Church is all about – and you can see

that shift in the activities many Churches engage in on any given week. As a pastor it frustrates me to see the kinds of things that often attract people to a particular Church. The so-called “successful” Churches of our day almost always have a full-time, professionally staffed daycare, offer family planning seminars, sport “worship” that enables people to “celebrate” rather than confronting the realities of sin and grace, and have a large gymnasium – which, more often than not, is called a “family life center.” May purport to teach how people can overcome what’s threatening to overcome them – and may even offer “Christian” aerobics to assist God’s people in putting forth a better front to the world!

This isn’t the way the Church saw Herself in the beginning. That’s not to say any of these things are necessarily bad, but I’m fearful that in most circumstances all they do is give people who are already busy living life just one more thing to occupy themselves with – when the *primary* purpose of the Church ought to be preparing God’s people for death! Yes, even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, when all the world is clamoring for the Church to be more “relevant,” the faithful Church still must be about the business of preparing people for death! And the events of the Transfiguration ought to keep us mindful of that fact.

Luke reports that when Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah on the mountain, the conversation which took place between them was concerning Jesus’ exodus – that is, His upcoming journey to Golgotha, the cross, death, and the grave. Death then, isn’t only a worthy subject to pursue while here on earth – but it’s also a subject pursued even in heaven. And was that not what Jesus was speaking of later in this Gospel when He said: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed?” The Son of

Man – God in human Flesh – took death upon Himself to defeat it – to take away its sting and power. Death is of such primary importance that God Himself comes to experience it – a fact which leaves us with the incredible, amazing truth that nearly 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem it wasn't only a man who died, but God Himself! Death, as a consequence of sin, so stirred the heavenly realms that Moses and Elijah met with our Lord Jesus on a mountaintop to speak about it – to assist Jesus in His preparation for that moment when He would meet death head-on and destroy it!

Isn't it fascinating how the earthly figures in this narrative seem entirely unconcerned about the whole subject of death? It wasn't that Peter and the others never thought about it, but at least in that moment, it was far from their minds. Perhaps since Jesus hadn't yet made His way to Jerusalem they thought His death might yet be avoided. And that's how it is today. Like these witnesses to the Transfiguration, most people in our world are moving steadfastly toward the grave, perhaps believing death will never overtake them. For most of us, death never even becomes an issue until someone near and dear dies, and we're finally forced to acknowledge death's existence and power. For those who are unprepared for it, death can become such a threat to life that they find themselves stricken with fear. But how many of them really consider what the Church has to offer? Will we not be bold enough – will we not care enough – to speak with them about death and offer them the only Hope for life – or will we shy away from the subject entirely and offer nothing but practical wisdom for living?

As a Church that lives with the reality of death, there is no reason to be gloomy in our outlook – or to live life looking as though we're going to expire at any moment. There's no reason for you to live your life this way, because if you're truly prepared to die, then you're also fully prepared to live. Jesus prepared Peter to

live by putting into his heart a true confession of faith so that he was then able to answer Jesus' question about who He was, saying: "You are the Christ." With that confession, Peter gave sure evidence that he was prepared both to die and to live – for in that confession Peter laid claim to Jesus' death on his behalf – and the abundant life Christ came to give to us all.

Dear Christian, this is the same confession our Lord Jesus lays on your heart. It emboldens you to speak of death even as in Him we all live and move and have our being. Today the Church earnestly confronts death by carrying out the ministry Jesus has given us. This happens whenever we gather around the Baptismal font and witness the death of the old man of sin and a rising to life of the new man of faith – as in that water of life God prepares yet another sinner for death by making him an heir of His everlasting Kingdom – giving him the promise of the resurrection – and the very same confession which once flowed from the mouth of Simon Peter.

It's at the font and in Christ's Church where God prepares us to live by preparing us to die. Lent will soon be upon us – which means Good Friday and the cross aren't very far off. In life, we all have our own season of death to deal with, but through it all we hear the voice of Jesus gently leading us past Good Friday to Easter Sunday. Like Peter, you and I will also one day see Jesus in all His heavenly glory. But by the time that Day arrives, the Church's mission will have finally been fulfilled, and we will all be at rest in the loving arms of our Savior. Then the saying will come to pass, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.