

Pastor T. C. Arnold  
Transfiguration Sunday  
Mark 9:2-9  
1/17/16

I love the smell of a gymnasium when a crowd gathers for a basketball game. You can smell the popcorn at the concession stand. The people are excited for the start of the game. The pep band is playing a song trying to motivate the players and fans. I loved it when I was playing and I loved it when I was watching. This is the kind of experience that truly stimulates the senses

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. That's sort of a strange name. However, it's descriptive in such a way that really couldn't be explained any better than from such a name. You see, on a mountain, high and away from the others, Peter, James, and John got the opportunity to see Jesus in a new way. He was "transfigured", that is He changed, right before their very eyes. This is what they saw. Now, they had the opportunity to hear something new. Could they smell anything different? I don't know, I wonder. I guess it really doesn't matter. But for today, we will focus on what Peter, James and John saw. We will consider the amazing things before their very eyes that day.

First, let's consider the people they saw. Before the very eyes of those three select disciples were the two most prominent and important men of the Old Testament. There was Elijah and there was Moses. There they were. Before their very eyes were the two heroes of the Old Testament. Elijah was considered the greatest of all the prophets. Moses was the giver of the Law to the people. Together they were the culmination of the entire history of Israel. The Law and the Prophets – Moses and Elijah.

It must have been a sight to behold. The two most important men in their lives, who were long gone in the minds of so many, were standing there right before them. Have you ever seen a hero of yours up close – maybe you only saw him on television and now finally you get to meet him or her or see them in person? What was your reaction? Were you excited? Were you like Peter, James and John, as it says in the text, not able to find the words of what to say because emotion overwhelmed them? I remember one of my brother's friends, who grew up out east that came with us to St. Louis and had the opportunity to meet Stan "The Man" Musial. I remembered how excited he was. Never had he seen his hero up close. And Stan Musial was very much alive. Now, think about the reaction of Peter, James, and John over their heroes Elijah and Moses – and they had long since been gone.

It's hard to describe how they must have felt. But that's not the end of seeing amazing things, that's only the beginning. You see, next they would see their Lord and master in a different way – They would see Jesus in a way that can't even be described in words. The Greek word describing the way Jesus looked is "stilbow". It means, "To glisten, and gleam brightly, to dazzle." Maybe even more specifically it means to be polished and shined in such a way that is indescribable. And that's the way that He looked. This is the only word that could be used to try to identify what they saw. It was greater than great. It was whiter than anything bleached. If seeing Elijah and Moses wasn't enough, now they see Jesus "transfigured" looking totally shiny, gleaming and dazzling before their very eyes. This is what they saw.

But that's still not the whole story. There's more. They saw something else. They saw a cloud. This was important, especially to Peter, James, and John. You see, they remembered the stories they had heard about their people for years and years. Going back to the book of Exodus, it was by a cloud that the people were led out of Egypt and out into the desert. This was the Lord Himself. Again, each time they erected the tabernacle in the desert – the Lord was there as a cloud – He was present among the people. Even in the Temple the Lord was there, in a cloud – He was present among the people. It wasn't until the Temple was destroyed during the Babylonian captivity that the presence of the Lord "seemed" to leave the people and the cloud (because the Temple was gone) had left them.

This was important – the cloud was back. They were looking at the cloud – the presence of the Lord was indeed with them in such a more intimate way than ever before. This is what they saw. Could you imagine? Could you even describe it? Could you contain your emotion? Would you get it right? Could you say the right things about what you saw? Could you describe it all in the right way?

You see, this is why Jesus didn't want them to talk about what they saw quite yet. There was more and it would all make more sense when everything came to completion in the resurrection. Jesus didn't want them to think that this was the great end all that be all. There's more. The kind of encounter that Jesus would give is more than just a "mountain top experience." Rather, "the more" would be His death and resurrection. The lesson from Jesus to keep our mouths shut in some instances can be a good one. The reason: we blab about too much and make more of what we should. There would be so much more for the disciples than a glowing Jesus.

We talk at times when we should keep our mouths shut. We use words that at times hurt, and, at times, we might not even realize it. Jesus wanted Peter, James and John to see God's glory and His divinity, not to speak about it because they didn't know the whole story. At times we are led to speak about things when we don't know the whole story. We may even speak poorly about others and hurt their reputations. Whether we would do such things intentionally or not, it is still what God would not have us do. Sometimes it's better to just observe, and not speak, like the disciples.

Watch and watch out. Watch for our Lord, watch out for temptation that desires to grab ahold of us and lead us away from the Lord. Watch, as the Lord does His miracles and speaks the words of Grace. Watch out for those tricks that are meant to trip us up – the deceptions of false religions and half truths about the Bible. Watch as our Lord would ascend that Mount of Transfiguration on a day like today and show His glory and fulfillment to the disciples. Watch out for those who tell lies about God, the world, and what isn't good for you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, watch – as we head into Pre- Lent and then Lent after that -- Watch. Watch, as Christ will be on His way to Jerusalem to stand before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate. Watch as our Lord will make His way down that road, carrying for a time the cross that He would die upon. Watch, as He would be nailed on that cross on Good Friday and bleed the life out of His body to clean us from the death that is in us. Watch, as they put Him in the tomb and watch, watch as you see Him there no longer.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, watch as the Lord makes His way toward our salvation. Today is a day we see a part of the glory that will save us. This is God in the flesh willing to die for us and wash away our sins because He loves us so much. And that's what He has done – He has washed away our sins by His death on the cross.

Peter, James and John saw a whole lot – more than they could adequately put into words. Today, we see a whole lot. We see our Lord at work in our lives – how He protects us, loves us, gives us what we have and even gives us what we share. All we have to do is to look out our window to see what God has done and what God has given. But more than just seeing, we hear His Word. That's what you heard today – His Word means life for you. It's more than what you see – it's also what you hear.

And it's also what you speak. God's love is being shared through you to others. It's more than what we see, it's more than what we hear – it's also what we say. May God's rich graces be to others as we have the opportunity to speak His Word to the nations. On this Transfiguration Sunday we rejoice in the glory He shows us. And that's something that affects every one of our senses. Amen.

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