

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-9
January 20th, 2012

This is a dark time of year. Most areas of our nation are dark for long periods of time during these winter months. The weather does affect our outlook on life. The farther north we live, the fewer hours of the daylight and often fewer hours of sunshine we have in our winter months. In portions of the Scandinavian countries and of Russia that lie above the Arctic circle, depression is much more common during the long winter months, and, alcoholism as a means of venting emotional frustrations is a serious problem.

It doesn't help either when the cold and dark days of winter coincide with pressures in our work and family. As work piles up, deadlines have to be met, and tensions increase, we don't feel at all as though we are on top of things. W2s are coming out quickly, taxes around the corner, and trying to get everything in order for another year mounts more and more tension on our shoulders. Sometimes we wonder whether we can get out from under it all. Our spirits are not always bright during these dark winter days.

So, we need a boost. We need something to energize our spirits, to lift us up, to impel us to positive thought and action. What we need is a glimpse of glory in the midst of dark days and bad news. The Gospel text may be just what the doctor ordered at this very moment of our lives. It offers not just a glimpse, but a view of Christ that will pave the way to so much more to come.

And what is that view of Christ? Well, let's go back to the Gospel reading for today. Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James and John (His inner circle of disciples) and headed up a mountain. This wasn't a strange thing. Remember, Jesus gave a great sermon on a mount. Teaching takes place on these high places and Jesus did much of that. But this experience would be much different. On this mountain Jesus prayed, and as He prayed He was "transfigured" before them. The word in the original Greek – the word that St. Matthew himself used – was *metamorpho* (metamorphosis) which means to change wholly different in form or in appearance. It's amazing to think what this might have looked like.

Jesus and His disciples, in the midst of some of their darkest of days – persecuted by religious leaders of the church and sometimes by society were experiencing something "other-worldly." They were seeing a bright light in their dark days. Jesus shows them a glimpse of the wonder yet to come. Jesus shows them a view of Christ's glory that was yet to come in greater ways. Jesus Himself was going to be the bright light of life in a place where everyone at that time knew – everyone in our time knows – the darkness of an unforgiving, relentless and difficult world.

"Just give me one small bit of good news," said the mother of the young girl who is now on her 3rd round of chemotherapy treatment – and the child's health does not seem to be improving. "Just let me see the light at the end of the tunnel," said the man who is going through a horrible divorce that continues to linger on. "Lord, if you would just take this pain from my aching body, the pain of these dark days of depression from me, these reminders of past transgressions that I continue to regret and see how much it has hurt myself and others..." said any of us at any given time.

So here we are, in this place – God's house. We are those people I just described. What caused it? Well, our miserable sins have caused it. Why is it so dark in this world – even darker because of these dark days of winter? Because of this world filled with sinners who press their sins upon us – the imperfection, the power of Satan to convince us and our neighbors that he has a better and more pleasing way for you.

So, here we are, in this place – God's house – miserable in our sins. Darkness is all around us – literally, emotionally, and spiritually. But you are in the right place for "darkened" Christians.

Today your Lord intervenes into your life. He gives you not just a glimpse but a view of Christ. How does He do this? He does this by the means He prescribed. He does this in the way He chooses so that none of us have to be confused about where God's light is in this dark world. You know where God is – His Word and His Sacrament. He is in the places He told us He would be. And we, today, are in the midst of that. This place is our Mount of Transfiguration. Mount of Transfiguration Lutheran Church. That would be an appropriate name. And the only name better is the one we have – the one we stand for – the Lord that is ours and who made it all happen in the first place: CHRIST!

Christ – our name's sake – chooses how He gives gifts. He chooses how He shows His glory (shining brightly on the top of a mountain to three of His disciples) and He chooses how He gives life through those precious gifts. God's gifts today give so much more than just a visual to Peter, James and John. His gifts come right down from heaven and into our lives today. God's gift is life today and eternal life to come.

In a recent Portals of Prayer devotion the author tells the story that He was born on Father's Day. He said that His dad always jokingly told him that he was the only gift he ever received that got bigger and more expensive every year. The father was teasing about the bigger and more expensive part. He was not teasing about the gift part. Yes, his son was a gift – a gift of life for his family. Though times got more difficult for the family when another mouth needed to be fed and bills kept on piling up – the life of a child was a gift from God.

That's important for all us to keep in mind. God gives us life eternal. God also gives us the life we have today. He is giver of all things and we remain stewards, managers, of His precious gifts. We belong to Him. *We are not our own.* All life is the Lord's and He is the determiner of when it begins and when it ends – no matter if we are talking about the elderly or the unborn. All are God's children. All are precious in His sight. In a world that “devalues” life more and more, we need to value it more and more because by doing so we make testimony that “*We are not our own. We were bought at a price.*”

How much does our Lord value life? He values it so much that He became the light of life. It was not just a glimpse but a view of Christ that would pave the way to so much more. A light brightly shining on the top of a mount would be small potatoes to what would be so great of a work for us. Compare the two – which one would say is more “fabulous”: the glowing Jesus on a mountain or the bleeding/dying Jesus on a cross? Anyone who does not know the outcome of Jesus' work would say the brilliant, glowing one for sure. But we know where life was given. We know where our Lord brought us back from the dead. It wasn't the “show” of brilliance that did it. It was the work of death that accomplished it.

Life is more important than brilliance – for you as much as it was for our Lord Jesus two thousand years ago. Jesus told Peter, James and John not to speak of the brilliance of Jesus because the death of Jesus would mean so much more – for you and for Him.

In these dark days, it's easy to run toward the light, the brilliance, the flash. We think that will save us, give us hope. But “the flash” of life often times ends up disappointing us. In these dark days, retreat to the cross. That deadly tree meant life for you – because you weren't on it. Your Lord was – with all your sins. By it, you are forgiven, strengthened and sustained to everlasting life our Lord purchased for you. Amen.

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