

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-9
February 5th 2017

Have you ever been to an event that you were not looking forward to... didn't want to go... just thought it would be a waste of your time? You went because your spouse made you go. You went because mom said you had to. You went, with a bit of a frown on your face because you have better things to do. You were sure that nothing much was going to happen so why not be somewhere else.

I wonder if Peter, James and John thought much would happen when they ascended the Mt. of Transfiguration some six days after Jesus had given them a difficult teaching on taking up the cross and following Him. Just before they went up that mountain with Jesus they were in Caesarea Philippi and Jesus was asking the disciples questions like, "*Who do you say I am?*" (16:15). Jesus also told the disciples that "*He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life*" (16:21). I'm sure the disciples were left scratching their heads. They may have even been left with some doubts about Jesus' words. They might have doubted much was going to happen on that mountain six days later – perhaps like you – when you didn't really want to go, but someone made you go.

Let's go back to Peter for just a moment. Remember that Peter had seen Jesus walk on water and had tried it himself, only to doubt and sink. Jesus asked, "Why did you doubt?" The disciples doubted that 5,000 people could be fed with such a small portion of food. Jesus answered their doubt with food for all. They, in an account after our Gospel lesson, had tried to cast out a demon and failed. They asked Jesus, "*Why couldn't we drive it out?*" Jesus answered, "*Because you have so little faith*" (17:20).

If doubt is the culprit for the disciples, could it be the culprit for us too? Jesus might well say the same things of us, "*Because you have so little faith.*" I think we would be fooling ourselves and each other if we didn't admit that we, present-day followers of Jesus Christ, have our doubts. Does God care about me personally? If so, why do I struggle with problem after problem in my life? Will He provide for me in my time of need? I have seen Him come through for others in times of need. Will He do the same for me? Am I really forgiven all my sins, even the sin that has troubled me for years?

We have seen the hand of God in our lives. We know that things have not happened by chance. We know of prayers that God has answered for us. Maybe we have seen and witnessed miracles in our lives. Maybe we have seen how God is changing things around for us and accomplishing His work so diligently. Still we doubt.

On that Mt. of Transfiguration the disciples needed to see a glimpse of glory just to calm those doubts. So do we. It would give us newfound assurance that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus would give the disciples then and us now a glimpse of just that on the Mt. of Transfiguration. They would see – just for a moment's time – a little peak into heaven. They would see Christ in all His glory and the great Moses and Elijah. He would do it so that there would be *no more doubts*.

Today, our little peak into heaven comes in the way of seeing the Scriptures of our Lord played out in our lives and receiving His ever-present, ever-visible gifts such as the sacraments. We see His face shone like the sun, and His garments become white as light. We see with our eyes of faith the very glory of the Son of God. This is what Moses, the great giver of the Law, saw – when He was

high atop Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. This is what Elijah, first and foremost of the prophets, saw when the Lord set fire to His sacrifice on top of Mt. Carmel when he was up against those prophets of the false god Baal. God came to give the people of the Old Testament the Law and the Prophets so that on this day, the Lord could point to the Gospel that came to save the world – Jesus the Christ. God had spoken, the Law had spoken, the Prophets had spoken -- The Savior has come! There is no more doubt.

The disciples wanted to remain there. Why leave? They had beheld the glory of God. They had heard the voice from the cloud, had seen Moses and Elijah. Why go down the mountain? There was no doubt on the mountain. There – it was easy to believe. There was no suffering on the mountain. It was a different world. How great it would be to live in a different world – a world better than ours.

That's what Peter wanted – but our Savior said no. If they were to stay on that mountain top, then you and I would be lost. Instead, our Lord went back down to be with the people – to be with you and me – to take on our sin and suffer so that we will have eternal life. It would have been easy to stay. Peter wanted to stay, for there are no doubts on the mountain. But the reality is God's people live here – in the midst of our troubles and fears – in the midst of our worries and adversities. The Lord wanted to be here with us – where sin causes us to doubt.

I recently came across an article written by a former professor of mine with the title "Monuments and Footprints" (Concordia Journal – 1996 Vol. 22, No. 1). It's an interesting title that came as a result of a quote from Nobel-Prize winning author William Faulkner. Faulkner once wrote, "A monument only says, 'At least I got this far,' while a footprint says, 'This is where I was when I moved again.'" It would have been very easy to "build a monument" on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration. It would have been very easy for any of us to say, "Let's stay here. We have all that we ever need and we are in the presence of God." But there is so much more our Lord needed to do for His children. Instead of building a monument on that mount, Jesus instead made a footprint. He carried forth, moved on, to do the work on what would become a much better and much bigger monument. It would be called Golgotha and the testament would be a cross and the prize would be His own blood for the life eternal you now enjoy.

Our Lord's footprints are places where we can put our own feet. They show us how to walk and show us how we are never alone when we walk. This game called life is hard. Our Lord knew that it would be. That's why He made tracks down the mountain. He made tracks to get to you. He made tracks to get to where the work would begin and where it would be completed. He made tracks to get to the cross so that heaven could be seen to all of us and not just Peter, James and John that Transfiguration day.

Sometimes those places we go and thought we would not enjoy, actually turn out to be pleasant experiences. The Lord was right – do not doubt it – much happened for us on the "far greater" mount called Calvary or Golgotha. It happened for you. And you never have to doubt it because it's yours. It's His glory just shown for a little while to Peter, James and John, to His glory shown for eternity. It's yours and that promise comes to you – not in bright lights or in a brief glimpse, but rather each day in blood. Amen.

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