

February 26, 2017
Sermon for Transfiguration Sunday
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 17:1-9

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Matthew 17:1–9 (ESV)

¹ And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The transfiguration of Jesus is an astonishing account with a lot of moving parts.

There is Jesus radiating with divine glory.

There are Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus about his crucifixion.

There is the cloud of God's glory and the voice from heaven.

There are treasures in each and every one of the things that the Holy Spirit has put before us today. But this morning, we will consider how it was with the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and how Jesus was comforting them in the tribulation because the glory of the transfiguration is a preface to the glory of the cross.

The disciples building tents—all for glory, not for a cross (vv 1–4). The Gospel of Luke tells us that the disciples start out sleeping, but the transfiguration wakes them up (Lk 9:32). They see Jesus in his glory, they hear the conversation Jesus is having with Moses and Elijah, and they want to keep that going. Again, Luke tells us that Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about His going to Jerusalem to die (Lk 9:31).

Peter, though, wanted to stay right there on the mountain. He wanted to capture the glory with tents. He wanted to keep Moses and Elijah here by making homes for them. If they never left the mountain, Jesus wouldn't have to die. Furthermore, Peter, James and John could have Jesus, as well as Moses and Elijah all to themselves.

We have this temptation to be like Peter. We like the glory of God, the power of God, the strength of God, especially when we think it will make things better for us. We like the shining Jesus. We enjoy the fun and fellowship that we have in church and at other activities. We don't want to leave that mountain top of glory to go down the mountainside where the being a Christian becomes a chore.

We don't want to look at the cross, like we will begin doing this coming Wednesday evening. We'd just leave Lent behind if we had our choice. We'd leave Christian service to our neighbor behind, if we had our choice. Just give us the joy, the potlucks and the forgiveness in Baptism and Holy Communion. You can keep all that sorrow and pain.

But we need the bleeding Jesus to be saved. Suffering must come first, and then glory, as Jesus preached to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: *"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"* (Lk 24:26).

We need the forgiveness of our sins **before** we are ready to live in God's glory. When God spoke from the cloud to the disciples saying: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* They threw themselves down, face first, greatly afraid—that's what glory without a cross will do to you (vv 5–6)!

God the Father's voice is a rebuke to Peter. Peter had his own ideas about how everything should be, but the voice from the cloud says, *"Listen to Him."* Listen to Jesus.

In particular, listen to what Jesus said just the other day, the saying Peter rebuked—that Jesus *"must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised"* (16:21). As Peter pulled Jesus aside and said: *"Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."*

To which Jesus replied: *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Peter had glory in mind then too. I'm sure that this was fresh on Peter's mind when the Father spoke, again catching Peter...and James and John with their minds on glory yet again.

Falling on their face suddenly puts Peter, James, and John into their right minds . . . which is being afraid! And according to Proverbs 9:10, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, ..."*

The fear of the Lord is also the first part of repentance.

The disciples realize that they, in fact, need more than the glory of Jesus revealed in the transfiguration.

This glory does not save them. As much as we may wish for a glory laden Jesus, riding a victory train across the nations, we could never stand with a God like that.

We have too many sins. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves. We covet, we lie, we cheat, we steal...we put ourselves first! Often times we look at our neighbors, as well as spouses, children or even our parents, as to what they can do for us, rather than what we can do for them. And sadly, we even do that with God...with Jesus. What can he do for us...or worse, what had He done for me lately.

Way too many ways we've fallen flat on our faces . . . which means oh so many reasons for us to fall on our faces in not just fear, but terror before the holy God.

We sorely need the Theology of the Cross. We need a Savior from our sins. We need a Savior who isn't transfigured...but one who is crucified.

In the midst of their terror, laying face down in the dust, Jesus touches the disciples and tells them to stand and not to be afraid.

In a moment, all the glory is gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. The cloud is gone. The brightness shining from the face of Jesus is gone. And this is for their comfort. The disciples standing with Jesus, unafraid—for the true glory of the cross is now ahead (vv 7–9).

It is Jesus in His humility that saves and comforts us.

From this moment forward, Jesus sets His face to go to Jerusalem, where His true glory then will be revealed in His death and resurrection.

The glory of the transfiguration shows us who Jesus is, that He is God in our flesh. We see His power. But the terrible humiliation of the cross is Jesus' true glory, because there He is our Savior. There our sins are paid for. When He is lifted up on the cross, we see His great love.

Now we can look forward to sharing in Christ's glory, for His great love in the cross has purified us from the sin that so terrorizes us before God. As you are facedown in the dirt, Jesus touches you on the shoulder and bids you to rise. Because of the cross, you are forgiven. Forgiven for hating your brother or sister. Coveting things and for caring only what they can do for you. For are forgiven for not loving the Lord your God with all your heart. You name it. No matter what else the devil might bring up, it is forgiven and forgotten. (Jeremiah 31:34)

We might think of the transfiguration as the "high point" of Jesus' ministry, but it is only a vantage point from which Jesus can see clearly where He is going and what needs to be accomplished.

From the height of the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus sees Jerusalem. From the glory of the transfiguration, Jesus sees the humiliation of His death on the cross. From the splendor of the transfiguration, Jesus sees the sorrow to come, and in the midst of that sorrow He sees you, your forgiveness, and your salvation.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.