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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Series A
Saturday, February 22nd, 2020
Sunday, February 23rd, 2020

Sermon: A Different Kind of Glory

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Focus: Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

Function: That they would listen to Jesus' Word and believe him.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it" (SC, Explanation of the 3rd Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain is one of the most fascinating stories in the Gospels. Historically, the Epiphany season focuses on the revelation of Jesus' divine majesty through his miracles: the visit of the magi, his baptism by John in the Jordan River, and the wedding at Cana. These miracle stories are important for us to rediscover a sense of mystery, to simply fall on our faces in awe before the wondrous ways of a God who comes to us clothed in human flesh to be our Savior. The transfiguration is the final and most glorious of all as Jesus shines forth in the brilliance of the sun, conversing with the two greatest Old Testament prophets, and God

the Father's voice booms from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son..."
(Matt. 17:5, ESV).¹

The transfiguration takes place about a week after Jesus' first passion prediction.² At Caesarea Philippi, beside the mouth of a cave known as the Gates of Hell, Jesus upset all the assumptions his disciples had about Messiah when he told them, in no uncertain terms, that he was going to die, that "he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt. 16:21). The thought of Jesus dead was too much for Simon Peter, who only a few moments prior had been praised by Jesus for declaring, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). But Jesus rebuked him: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23). Then he told them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

Crucifixion was the most horrific form of public execution the world has ever seen. Invented by the Greeks and perfected by the Romans, crucifixion was reserved for non-citizens in the Roman

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

² Matthew and Mark have "six days"; Luke has "about eight days" (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28).

Empire—and only for the worst of the worst: thieves, murders, and insurrectionists. And now Jesus told his disciples he was going to die on a cross, and they must be ready to follow.

We can only imagine what kind of rain clouds hovered above the disciples' heads after those two depressing declarations. From that point on, every step Jesus took was a step toward the cross. As Luke writes in his gospel, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). With bold determination, Jesus the Messiah ventured forth on the *Via Dolorosa*, the way of suffering, the road that went through the valley of the shadow of death to meet its literal dead end at Golgotha.

The disciples were not eager to die. They hoped for victory over Israel's enemies, not death and defeat. Were they wrong about Jesus? Was he truly who they thought he was, who he *said* he was? Jesus was going about the task of Messiah in a rather different fashion than the expected one. You can almost hear in the hearts an echo of the question asked by John the Baptist, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3).

So on the mount of transfiguration, the heavens opened, and Jesus shined. His appearance was so glorious and terrifying that the disciples could not bare to look. They fell on their faces in fear as Peter fumbled about for the right words, which turned out to be the wrong words, as was usually the case with Peter, who suffered from an incurable case of foot in mouth disease—as in “open mouth, insert foot.” Ever impulsive and impetuous, Peter always opened his mouth before he thought better of. He never learned what his mother tried to teach him: “Simon, think before you speak” and “It is better merely to be *thought* a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

Peter actually *interrupted* Jesus while he spoke with Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament, representing the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures. Oh, to be there and hear *that* discussing! Of what did they converse? Matthew doesn't say, but Luke does: they “spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). They spoke of Jesus' departure, his *exodus*, his journey to the cross.

But Peter wanted to prattle on about pitching tents and setting up camp. So God told Peter to shut up and listen instead: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matt. 17:5).

Here was the divine Word and assurance that Jesus truly was (and is) the Son of God, Messiah, Lord, and Savior. So “*listen to him!*” Listen to Jesus. Hear what he has to say because nobody else has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). No one else ever spoke like this man (John 7:46). And no one ever will.

When the vision ended, the prophets disappeared from sight. “They saw no one but Jesus only” (Matt. 17:8). And that is just as well, because Jesus is enough. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame...” (Heb. 12:2, NIV).³

I know that, like Peter, many of us wish that we could have been there on the mountain when Jesus’ was transfigured before them. And I am willing to bet that most of us would have liked to stay on that mountain and not come back down. But you cannot stay on the

³ All Scripture references marked NIV are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984 ed.

mountain. Have must come down and journey through the valley. You cannot have glory without the cross. In order to become immortal, first you must die. If you want to follow Jesus, you first must take up your cross.

The only way you can do it is because Jesus did it first. He led the way. He took up his cross and died for the sins of the whole world—for you and me. He chose Mount Calvary instead of the Mount of Transfiguration. He chose the cross instead of glory. And that *became* his glory. For on the cross, Jesus proved his mettle and showed what he was really made of. When the priests mocked him and said, “If you *are* the Son of God, come down from there!” (cp. Matt. 27:40), Jesus did the opposite. He stayed on the cross and died and, in so doing, proved he was God’s beloved Son, his chosen One. Because Jesus learned obedience and did what was right, carrying out the Father’s will by his death on the cross, the Father was pleased with him. And because the Father is pleased with Jesus, now he is pleased with you.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus told his disciples, “Rise, and have no fear” (17:8). On the third day, *Jesus* rose from the dead,

and still he bids us not to be afraid. We fear no more—not just because of Jesus’ glory, but mainly because of his grace. The Day will come when we see again his face shine in glory brighter than light. But until that day, we see his face framed by the cross. It’s a different kind of glory than that which the world seeks, but in the cross of Christ we glory, because the place where Jesus’ life came to an end is the place where *our* life began. All glory be to Jesus! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.