

Matthew 17.1-9  
Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord  
21 January 2018  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

“Shh! Not a word. Don't breathe a word of this to anybody. Say nothing about *this* glory of the Son of God.”

So Jesus instructs the three. Impetuous Peter. James and John, always seeking their own glory—or always trying to hitch their wagon to the glory of Jesus. To them He says: “Don't say a thing.

“Don't say a thing. Don't preach it to others. And, for the love of God, don't preach it to yourselves. Because if you do, you'll miss the greater glory.”

Far greater glory. A glory that shows God for who He really is. A glory that doesn't smoke you when you see it. A glory that doesn't shout from split clouds. A glory that isn't “borrowed,” as it were, from the truth uttered by the great prophets of old. A glory that doesn't gleam with the brilliance of transformed flesh.

Instead, a glory clothed in dirty, dusty, blood-stained flesh. A glory noted only by the words of a pagan centurion—“Surely, This One was the Son of God.” A glory under the cover darkness. A glory in which not man, but God, is smitten. A glory that is the self-immolating love of God. On the Holy Cross.

Fellow-redeemed: if you would know the Transfiguration glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must first know the inglorious glory of the Son of God crucified. Not for Himself. But for you.

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That's Jesus' point, isn't? “Don't say a thing,” He says, “until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” And if He must be raised from the dead, He must first die.

Of course, Peter, James, and John—that's the part of the story they don't like so much. In fact, they *hate* it.

Just six days earlier, Jesus had told them what they needed to know: He began to show His disciples, Matthew says, that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

But Peter wouldn't have anything to do with that. “Far be it from You, Lord!” he blurted out. Only to earn the sharp rebuke of Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan.”

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“Satan,” He calls him—How'd like to be called “Satan” by God's own Son?

“Satan,” Jesus calls Peter. For Satan will not have this cruciform glory of the Son of God known. In fact, if he can and could, he wouldn’t allow the Son of God to be glorified in this way at all, on His holy Cross.

Why? Because then the entire point and thrust of Satan’s existence, then his very *raison d’être*, must come crumbling to the ground. And he in great defeat.

Because then the accuser of Jesus’ brothers and sisters can no longer accuse. For the accusation has been leveled against the very Son of God, and the death-sentence carried out.

Because then the specter of the condemning God raised by Satan must evaporate and be dashed to pieces. For God will have revealed Himself as He is: as the God who, according to His very own Word, would not have the death of the sinner.

In fact, this God would rather die for sinners than have them die.

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But I suppose in all fairness, we need to put ourselves in Peter’s shoes, don’t you? After all, *why* couldn’t God have done this whole redemption thing in a different way? Why couldn’t the Son of God in all His transfigured glory, seated with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven—why couldn’t He have just...waved His hand? Made it all go bye-bye? He’s got that kind of power, doesn’t He?

But, fellow-redeemed, God isn’t a fiction writer. And this point must be underscored. God doesn’t deal in fictions. He doesn’t write fictions. And He sure as hell doesn’t write Himself into fictions. Instead, the very real God deals with very real sinners in a very real way.

No flippant waving it off on the heavenly throne. Instead He makes His throne the flesh of sinners.

No nod to a lieutenant of the heavenly court to accomplish His love for sinners on His behalf. Instead, it must be a nod in which He breathes out His last.

And for your sake, there is no fiction. No false hopes. No fakery. No feints and parries. Instead, in the view of all the world. In front of real men at a real time in a real place, He faces the enemy of us all—Satan, and with him sin, and death. And in His defeat, He defeats them. The crucified Victor. *God in the flesh*.

But here’s the real kicker. If you’ve been redeemed by the crucified Son of God, then *you* will be transfigured to His crucifixion. Those are the very next words out of Jesus’ mouth after He rebukes Peter: “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” Denial. Death. Death to self. And denial to self of easy days. This is the Christian life. And in it, as in His holy Cross, the glory of God is shown. For to those who do not gain the whole world, He gives the kingdom of heaven. And to those who are drowned and killed in the water of Baptism, He gives eternal life. The glory of God. The glory of the Gospel. That the Lord God of heaven and earth in all His majesty—this one, standing between Elijah and Moses, transfigured so that He shone in all His majestic brilliance—should desire to save...you. A sinner.

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But that is an inglorious glory. A glory that, at the end of the day, to Peter’s mind, doesn’t compare to the one here on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And so, up on that mountain, seeing the Christ in all His transfigured glory, he says, “Lord, it is good that we are here.”

Who wouldn't? Because otherwise it's crosses to be borne. A God who dies. A God who's mocked and beaten and spat upon. Who wouldn't want to stay up there on the mountain, and get what he has coming to him *already*?

And why in the world, if you had this already, would you give it up? And what will happen to you when you lose the vision...and come down from this mountain?

There the security of the glorified Jesus! But here, the vicissitudes of life.

There the defeat of all sins and death! But here, nothing *but* sins and death.

There, the proleptic glory of the resurrection! But here, nothing but the cross and suffering.

What's Peter to do? How about James and John?

And what about *you*?

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“Listen to Him.”

Listen to Him. Which is to say, “words, not sight.”

There could be almost no more comforting Word of Scripture than that: “Listen to Him.” Because in the face of all sins, in the face of death, in the face of the devil and hell, in the face of all my suffering (and, fellow-redeemed, when I'm honest with myself, that's all I can see. Sin, death, devil, hell and suffering.) But in the face of all that, I am not left alone. I have something. I have Christ's Word. And if I have Christ's Word, I have Christ, because He's chosen to pack Himself and all His glory transfigured, crucified, resurrected, and ascended—all His glory—He's chosen to pack up His glorious Self into His Word...as if it were a suitcase....*precisely* so that under cross and suffering and loss, where I seem to have Him least, I might have Him in all His fullness. And in having Him have everything.

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Isn't that something? Today you came into church in no better shape than last week. It didn't go well for you. Remember that sin from last week you swore off of? Well, you've done it again. The patience you prayed for? Well, you weren't exactly Peter patience. The good that you would have done, that did you not do. The evil you would have avoided—well, that you did. And you have a devil around your neck accusing you. Constantly. Even now.

But, fellow-redeemed, you are not left alone. Because do you see up here? There's the font where you were baptized. Water combined with Christ's own *Word*. Did you hear Pr. Kerns at the start of the service? I forgive you all your sins. Words spoken at Christ's command and Word. And do you see what's sitting up there on the altar—wine and bread that Christ by His *Word* makes into His own body and blood for you for the forgiveness of all your sins? Tokens all of them of the divine majesty that you are not left alone against sin. Against devil. Against the very gates of hell. No, instead, you have Christ's Word. Listen to Him.

Because someday, unless the Lord Jesus returns before then, you're gonna lie on your death you're your health? Gone. Control over your very own body? Gone. Even your involuntary movements like breathing.

And what will you have then? Christ. Christ who in His own death put to death the death you will die. In short, you'll have *everything*. Because in your death you will receive life, and heaven, and the vision of the Son of God. Nothing short of what Peter, James, and John saw. And then you will say an everlasting "Lord, it is good that we are here."

But in the meantime, you must take up your cross and follow Him.

Just see to it that you listen to Him—to the One who by His own cross sanctified yours; who by His own cross forgave you all your sins, defeated all your death, and trampled Satan and hell underfoot. For you. And who in His transfiguration prefigured the glory of your redemption. The Lord keep you firm and steadfast in this Word and faith until you die!

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*  
*jsb*