

The Transfiguration of our Lord—February 9, 2025

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“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.’ 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.’”

Peter is relatable. He’s one of those people in the Bible you read and hear what he says and does and one moment you are in awe of his words and the next you are putting your palm on your face and shaking your head almost embarrassed for him. He’s always on the move and in the thick of things. Sometimes his actions move quicker than his mind and he ends up seeing why thinking first before speaking or acting is an important thing. Peter is more of a shoot and ask questions later kind of guy or should we say cut off an ear first and then survey the situation. Peter goes from high to low very quickly, in this regard. You see, though, the thing about the Bible is that it’s true. These were real people and real events that happened. Peter had these high points confessing to Jesus, “You are the Christ” and the next minute he’s being called “Satan” by Jesus, the very Lord he just confessed. That’s people, he’s relatable.

You think about your own life at times and it’s no different. Sometimes it’s all in the span of a single day that one goes from a faithful confession and then the next minute it’s far from it. Pastors are not excluded from this either and often suffer from the “foot in mouth” disease on a regular basis. People are fickle because you and I still have the sinful man hanging around our necks. This goes beyond just words and actions but extends as well to how we see Jesus when we are left up to ourselves.

Not long before this reading near the end of Matthew 16, the Evangelist recorded, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he 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.” Jesus was teaching his disciples what must happen. It’s what he came to do in order to redeem his people. This is all, however, counterintuitive to what one might think or even want when thinking about how salvation is accomplished. Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God and now Jesus teaches the disciples he must suffer and die and then rise from the dead? Peter said to Jesus, “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But he [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance [stumbling block] to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”

Here, today, in the Transfiguration Peter is present again. After this great confession and stern rebuke from Jesus we are told by Matthew, “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”

This glorious sight was seen by Peter, James, and John. It’s indescribable what they saw. Trying to explain what happened in the Transfiguration is a difficult thing. The Greek word is where we get the word, “metamorphosis” from and denotes a change in form or appearance. These three disciples saw this happen with Jesus; they were given a glimpse of the unveiled glory of Jesus on this mountain. Matthew goes on to tell us what happened next. “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.’”

Peter sees this sight and it’s as if he’s thinking to himself, “this is great Lord! Let’s build some tents for you, Moses, and Elijah to dwell so that this may last, and this be your dwelling place. What a place to be and sight to behold!” The disciples are seeing this sight and it’s great so why not stay here as long as they can. Here on the mountain building tents to dwell with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus would be more than just a camping trip, it would be dwelling with the very Lord who tabernacled among them. It’s relatable but this is not what is to be.

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What happens next is a bit comical in the sense of how it happens. Matthew writes, “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.” Did you catch that? God interrupted Peter. He cut him off and Peter experienced first-hand Psalm 46 when it says, “be still and know that I am God.” God was sending a message to Peter when he was in the presence of God, “Your mouth is to be closed and your ears open. See this one transfigured before you, this one whom you confessed a few days ago to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Listen to him because he is indeed the beloved Son of the Father.”

Peter went from high to low pretty quickly. God, though, is pretty good at that. He’s in the business of bringing down low but his purpose is for bringing back up. He tears down in order to build anew. He kills in order to make alive. God is God, Peter isn’t, and neither are we. God brought him low but spoke a word to him of comfort. We heard what happened next, “When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.” God didn’t leave Peter low. He didn’t leave him, James, and John cowering in their fear either. Jesus came and touched them and said, “Rise and have no fear.”

Saints of God take to heart what you hear today in this reading from Matthew 17. See these three men go up the mountain with Jesus and learn from this who you are before God. Also see, though who God is for you in this one Jesus and what he says to you even as he spoke to Peter, James, and John.

As Christians who do love the things God, our sinful man still is tempted to look around and lose sight of Christ. It’s easy to want to look for things which may be glorious and in which we want to make our dwelling. Who among us wants to see this life in terms of a call to repentance where we are daily to die to sin and the fallen world? Wouldn’t we rather be taken up on a mountain and see the Lord transfigured? Wouldn’t we rather see and find in all our troubles, sufferings, and crosses we’re bearing simply being lifted and taken off our shoulders and we live lives that are free from all these things? Wouldn’t we like it if we could just build a tent on the mountain and not have to come down into the world and live vocations that call us to sacrifice and love our neighbors? Wouldn’t it be nice if God didn’t call us to repentance? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could be speaking and telling God the way things should be? Well, that’s what our sinful nature wants. But what does God say?

God interrupts those thoughts and speaks. Look to Jesus. Lift your eyes and see Jesus only. The Father tells you, “Listen to him.” The Epistle reading teaches you this as well as the Holy Spirit inspired St. Peter to write, “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Listening to Jesus is following where he leads. Jesus said at the end of Matthew 16, “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

God revealed himself to Peter, James, and John and he reveals himself to you today. Even with those sights that Peter saw with his own two eyes he tells you there is something more fully confirmed which is yours even now. You have God’s word, and this word teaches and proclaims to you what happened next. Jesus came down from the mountain and headed to another place where people would look and see him. That place was Golgotha where he was lifted up upon the cross. At that place there weren’t any voices saying, “let us build tents.” Instead, there were taunts, mocking, deriding words, and a shout of “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

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Yet it's at that place where you see a glory made known to you and for your good. Beholding Jesus in glory and power is understood through the cross. Before the resurrection is death. Before Easter is Good Friday. The crucified Lord is your redemption. You see him brought low, brought to nothing, enduring the shame of the cross, and obedient unto death. But in his death, you are glorified and brought high. You see this joyous, cheerful, blessed exchange of him who God "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This is the one who was transfigured on the mount in the reading today, died on the cross, was laid in the tomb, and the one who rose on the third day confirming all that he had said and done was complete and is for you. This is who Peter rightly confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

The Lord looks upon you today as you are here in this place. This is Mt. Zion the church. You enter this place every week from a world that would draw your focus away from Jesus. It would have you react and act according to things like fear, anger, uncertainty, retribution, and so many other things. It would have you open your mouths before closing them to hear what the Lord says as you are living in this world. And the guidance you see when you turn on your televisions, computer screens, phones, or whatever may be the case is often far from godly. It wants you to see redemption, healing, and life apart from who God is, what he has done in Christ, and what this means for you as his baptized child in this world. Don't look down and to yourself but look to Jesus.

Here you are this morning. You know what? It's good to be here even as Jesus is here right now. Confessing your sin, you bow your head as one who knows what you rightly deserve. The Lord comes to you, touches you with your baptism, his Scriptures, and his body and blood given in the Supper and says, "Rise and have no fear." When you lift up your eyes, you are forgiven. Now, rather than seeing and hearing all the voices around you crying out for your attention and gaze you see only Jesus. Sin, death, and the devil are all silenced and put in their place and what you behold instead is the Lord crucified and risen for you and the promises he has given you of a future glory to come. Your eyes of faith see that your Lord Jesus, is the one whose power is made perfect in weakness and who makes foolish the wisdom of the world even as he has accomplished your salvation by dying on the cross. Death is destroyed by death. How does that make sense? It doesn't but it is believed and understood only by the Spirit which has been given to you.

You leave this place, the church, each week knowing Christ and his peace. Your hearts and minds have been set on the things above, the things of God. You view the world through the lens of Jesus the crucified and risen one who has called you his own. You face suffering, trial, crosses, and even death as ones who know what really speaks forth in all of this; Christ who has overcome the world by his obedient life, innocent suffering, and death. That's a wonderful thing to cling to, or a rather a wonderful God to cling to, as you go through this life covered in Christ and what he has fulfilled and accomplished for you. You have been brought low but raised up in newness of life.

And now, hearing God's word, you do open your mouth and speak. As Christians you confess and speak forth that word of God which has been placed upon your lips. Your lives are lived in this too as a living sacrifice having been metamorphosized by God through the Holy Spirit. You rise and have no fear in this world because, as Romans 8 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Behold Jesus and Jesus only. Fight the good fight of faith knowing that your Lord has already won the day. Go down from the mountain as those who look to the Lord lifted up in the glory of the cross. Rise and have no fear for the Lord is yours and you are his even as he will stand over your grave one day and say to you "rise." What a day that will be dear saints of God and it truly will be good to be there. On that day, the sight of the transfiguration of the Lord in all his glory will be never ending. There won't be a need to build tents because the Lord has already prepared a dwelling for you. It's good to be here today and it will be good to be there forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.