

## Sermon for February 26, 2017 – Transfiguration Sunday

### Matthew 17:1-9 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: **Lord, it is good for us to be here**

- 1) To Witness your glory.
- 2) To hear your Father's voice.
- 3) To have a foretaste of heaven.

*Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James; and he led them up onto a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>There he was transfigured in front of them. His face was shining like the sun. His clothing became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup>Just then, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup>Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Just then, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him." <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell face down and were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Jesus approached and as he touched them, he said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup>When they opened their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone. <sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Do not tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

While a senior at college, I met a freshman name Clayton, who, rumor had it, could play guitar really well. Little did I know what this meant until I walked through the dorms one day and heard this wonderful, classical, spanish guitar piece playing through the hallway. Since it sounded far beyond what any pastoral, college student would be capable of, I was convinced that it was a CD. I went to Clayton's room to ask him what he was listening to. Lo and behold: it wasn't a CD, but Clayton himself – playing the guitar! Rumor had it that Clayton was a good guitar player, but I would have never guessed how good if I hadn't heard him for myself!

Our sermon text for this morning finds Jesus' disciples all confessing that he is the Son of God. Jesus' teachings and miracles convinced them of this fact. But it's one thing to "know" something about someone and quite another thing to experience it – and this is something that none of the disciples had the privilege of doing up until this point.

But that was going to change for three of them. Why? Because Jesus knew that his sacrifice was fast approaching, and that all the events surrounding his crucifixion would put a severe strain on the disciples' faith. During the depths of his passion, Jesus would seem to be anything but the Son of God. This is why Jesus chose three of them to experience his true glory so that they could encourage the other disciples when the day seemed darkest.

But Jesus' didn't just want to encourage the twelve, he wants to encourage us as well. You see, Jesus knows all about the trials we face in life: the godless culture that mocks us for what we

believe and the temptations we feel to give up our faith in the LORD. This is why Jesus had the account of his transfiguration recorded in the New Testament.

Therefore, with our ears serving as our eyes, let us go back in time – imagining what it was like to see the transfigured Christ, under the theme: **Lord, it is good for us to be here:** 1) *To witness your glory.* 2) *To hear your Father's voice.* 3) *To have a foretaste of heaven.*

### Part One: To Witness your glory

Imagine for a moment that you are Jesus' disciple James and I am your brother John. It is the summer of 28 AD. We have been following Jesus for about two years, listening to him preach and perform miracles.

About a week earlier Jesus asked all the disciples who he was. Peter, who is always quick to answer, spoke for all of us when he said: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*<sup>iii</sup> Jesus commended Peter for this answer, but then started talking about how he had to *go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*<sup>ii</sup>

Peter tried to rebuke Jesus for talking so negatively. *Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"* Jesus turned and said to Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*<sup>iii</sup> Jesus then went on to explain to all of us: *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*<sup>iv</sup>

I have to admit that none of us understood exactly what Jesus was talking about, but we were sure that, in time, Jesus would reveal to us what he meant.

As I said, that was about a week ago. Today Jesus asked you, Peter and me to go on a little hike with him to a secluded place where he could pray. Leaving the other disciples behind, we climb a rather high mountain. The exercise and altitude leave us feeling a little sleepy.<sup>v</sup> As we rest with Peter, Jesus goes off a little way and begins to pray.

But, just as we are about to fall asleep something amazing happens: Jesus' appearance changes right before our eyes!<sup>vi</sup> His face becomes blindingly bright – shining like the sun in all its glory. His clothes become so dazzling white that they look like light.

We are wide awake now – astonished at the brilliance of what we're seeing. All of a sudden, Moses and Elijah appear arrayed in wonderful splendor. They begin talking with Jesus about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.<sup>vii</sup> It sort of sounded like the conversation Jesus was trying to have with us a week earlier.

We all look at each other awestruck: Yes, we always believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but little did we **know** that he was *the Son of God!* What I mean is this: we always believed what Jesus told us, but seeing his glory with our own eyes . . . wow! How blessed we are to have such

a teacher – to be able to speak to and learn from the Son of God himself! What a privilege to be able to lay all our questions and problems before him and know that he has both the power and love to help us.

Yes, the sight is so wonderful that Peter blurts out what we are all thinking, “*Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*” He forgot about a shelter for us, but we understood what he meant: he wanted this moment to last forever!

### Part Two: To hear your Father’s voice

But as Peter talks, a strange cloud starts to surround us: one unlike any other. It is neither dark nor does it cast a shadow, but is actually very bright. Stranger still, as this bright cloud appears, a terror starts to grow in our hearts and we don’t understand why.

All of a sudden we hear a voice speaking from the cloud and we realize that this cloud is none other than the Glory of the LORD – the same great cloud that led the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, shook Mount Sinai and filled the temple at its dedication. This cloud is the presence of the LORD. It’s no wonder, then, that we fall down in terror: the allpowerful, all holy God who absolutely hates sin is surrounding us. How can we, sinners that we are, even begin to stand in his presence? His all holy voice terrifies us because we know the eternal punishment we deserve because of our sins.

But listen to what God says, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.*” As we hear God the Father say this, we think, “Yes, Jesus truly is the Son of God! We know this now more than ever.” Oh how foolish we have been! All too often we have let our own ideas about who Jesus should be dictate our thoughts and actions to such a degree that we didn’t truly listen to him. Such was the case with Peter, as he, a week earlier, tried to deter Jesus from going to Jerusalem to suffer and die for our sins. Yes, we are certainly foolish. As we hear God speak, we can’t help but think about our past pride and doubt; how we have not accepted everything Jesus tried to teach us. We are sinners in the hands of the living God. How can we not be filled with terror?<sup>viii</sup>

But then there is silence. . .

As we still shake in terror, we feel Jesus’ gentle touch and hear him say, “*Get up, and do not be afraid.*” Slowly, we look up and around. The cloud, the light, Moses and Elijah, the voice. . . they are all gone. We see no one except Jesus, who has changed back to his familiar, humble, human form.

We think to ourselves: It was certainly good to hear the Father’s voice! True: His glory reminded us of our sins, but his message was wonderful. Jesus truly is the Son of God, and we need to listen to him - not half heartedly, nor imagining that we know better. No, we need to truly listen to him – exerting every effort to learn from him and humbly asking his help to understand and believe. And why should we listen to Jesus? First of all because God the Father

has commanded us to do so. Secondly, because Jesus has the words of eternal life.<sup>ix</sup> No one can come to the Father except through him.<sup>x</sup>

Yes, it truly was good for us to be here: witnessing Jesus' glory, hearing the Father's voice and having a foretaste of heaven.

### Part Three: *To have a foretaste of heaven.*

As we begin our hike down the mountain, we are at a loss for words. What we experienced . . . it was beyond anything we could have ever imagined! Yes, it was scary when God talked, but it was also wonderful to see Jesus in all his glory and be at such peace as he conversed with Moses and Elijah. Truth be told, we would love to go back up that mountain. It was one of those life moments we wished would have lasted forever. We can't wait to tell the other disciples. Will they believe us?

Jesus must have read our minds because, as we walk down, he gives us the strict command: "*Do not tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.*" At first we don't understand why Jesus said this, but time makes it clear. You see, there were a lot of weird ideas going around that the Messiah would establish some sort of political kingdom on this earth. Jesus was not that kind of Messiah. He did not want the people to have false ideas about him, or use him as a rallying point to revolt against Rome. This is why he wanted to keep his true identity somewhat hidden until after everything was accomplished for our salvation. Then, Jesus would want us to tell everyone everything. Why? So they could see that He truly is the Messiah, who saves his people from a far greater threat than Rome. He saves us from our sins.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us now, leaving our imagination behind, come back to 2017 and reflect on this sight we have just viewed in Scripture. Our eyes of faith have seen Jesus revealed in his true glory as our Savior God. What relevance will this account have for our lives now?

I don't know about you, but reflecting on Jesus' transfiguration has encouraged me to listen to God's Word all the more closely. I see Jesus – not as some milquetoast who can't defend himself, but as the all powerful, all glorious Son of God that he is. Reflecting on Jesus' transfiguration, I am encouraged to live my life all the more boldly – unafraid to confess him to others. And why is that? Because I know that he truly is the Son of God.

Finally, reflecting on the glory Jesus displayed on the Mount of Transfiguration, I am encouraged to look forward to the end of time, when I will be with Jesus forever in glory. Oh, what a day that will be, when he comes again, raises the dead, and we will be glorified!

St. John once wrote: *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*<sup>xi</sup> Can you picture what that day will be like? It will certainly be wonderful for us Christians. And the thought of that glorious day makes all the hardships I may have to face in life all the more bearable.

Lord, it certainly was good for us to be here: to see your glory through the eyes of faith; to hear your voice through sacred Scripture; and to receive a wonderful foretaste of the things you are preparing for all who cling to you in repentance and faith. May what we experienced today lead us to cling to you ever more firmly through your Gospel, as you guide us through life by means of your Word, home to yourself in heaven. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 16:16 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 16:21 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 16:22-23 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 16:24 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> cf. Luke 9:32

<sup>vi</sup> cf. Luke 9:29

<sup>vii</sup> cf. Luke 9:31

<sup>viii</sup> cf. Hebrews 10:31

<sup>ix</sup> cf. John 6:68

<sup>x</sup> cf. John 14:6

<sup>xi</sup> 1 John 3:2 NIV84