

February 3, 2008
Transfiguration

“Lord, It Is Good to Be Here!”

MATTHEW 17:1-9

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

It is one of those phone calls you never want to receive. Someone you love has been in a car accident. They are in the hospital and waiting for emergency surgery that will save their life. You want to be with them and near them. You think about them constantly and pray for them fervently.

So it was with Jesus’ beloved disciples. Six days before Jesus allowed Peter, James and John to have a glimpse of his glory, he told them about the terrible suffering and death that was coming soon for him. We are told in Matthew 16: 21, “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must 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.” Peter was so distraught by these words he actually tried to dissuade Jesus from going up to Jerusalem.

These distraught disciples needed this glimpse of glory that Jesus gave them on the mountain. It was a glorious moment, so glorious, Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” What if we could wake up every morning, facing the challenges and troubles of every new day with these words of Peter, “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” Life is always good when we find ourselves in that very special place where we see that the glory we have in Jesus shining brightly even in the darkest moments that life brings us.

It is good to see Jesus’ glory

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.” Jesus led them to a high mountain to be alone with him. Some of your best moments in life come to you when you are alone by yourself with Jesus. He comes to us here on the pages of the Bible and reveals his glory to us. John 1:14 says, “And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” In 2 Peter 1 Peter wrote to scattered Christians of every age. “And we

have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." There used to be a saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." No where is this more true than in the life of a Christian who is led by Jesus into his Word and whose eyes are opened to see the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.

What the disciples saw on that mountain with their physical eyes, we are privileged to see this morning with our faith eyes. "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light." Jesus was transfigured or changed. The Greek word is "metamorphomai" from which we our English word "metamorphosis." I remember learning that word in about second grade. It was the fall of the year and one of the children brought in a caterpillar that ate the leaves of the milkweed plant. We watched as it went into a chrysalis and then changed into a Monarch butterfly. Here Jesus changes in outward appearance. He allowed the disciples to see his glory that he had as their Lord and God from eternity. His face shone like the sun. His clothes were shining in glory.

It is amazing what you can see this morning with your faith eyes. You are privileged to see Jesus standing with Peter, James and John and shining in his glory. You believe that this transfiguration or this metamorphosis reveals to us that Jesus is Lord and God. It was C.S. Lewis who said that there are only four conclusions you can draw about Jesus. If you do not believe he is Lord and God, you are stuck believing he is a liar, or lunatic or legend. Some people look at Jesus and say, "That is only just a story or legend that was put into a book called the Bible." Or they say he was not telling the truth when he claimed he was God or that he was deluded when he made the claims of being the Son of God. The words of John in John 1 are your words because of the miracle faith eyes that have been given to you. "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

This moment of glory on the mountain is further enhanced by the miraculous appearance of Moses and Elijah. "Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus." As you read the Bible you discover miracles surrounding the life of Jesus. People are raised from the dead. The blind see. Jesus raises himself from the dead. All of these miracles including the miracle of Moses and Elijah coming back to life are recorded in the Bible to bring us to that very special place where we see Jesus as our Lord and God. John 20 says of these mighty miracles. "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing you might have life through his name."

Peter could not get enough of this glorious moment. "Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'" Why do we carry cameras with us when we visit special places? I have in my hand a book my daughter made for us of special moments in our family, pictures put onto pages, special memories that you want to keep and cherish. Peter wanted to preserve this moment and make it last a long time. Some of the best moments of your life can actually be moments of pain and suffering when everything is taken away from you, and you are left alone with Jesus and see nothing but his glory. Romans 5 says, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us..."

This special moment on the mountain that has now become part of our lives through faith, was further enhanced and glorified by the voice of the Father speaking from a cloud that surrounded them. "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.'" Imagine what it must have been like to be surrounded by this mysterious cloud and then hear the voice of the Father speak about his love for Jesus, his Son. At first the disciples were struck with fear, but then Jesus said, "Get up, do not be afraid."

Fear comes into our lives when we see the reality of how far we fall short of God's glory in everything we do. This past week was no exception for all of us. God certainly was not pleased with the lives of people this planet earth. He was not pleased with those awful people who put bombs on mentally handicapped people and then blew them up in two crowded pet stores in Baghdad. We are shocked at such behavior from human beings. We are also shocked when we see evil thoughts pop up in our lives. We think bad thoughts about other people. We fail to show them love and kindness when they need someone to care about them. God gives us the blessing of money and we spend it foolishly. Jesus said of the evil heart that corrupts each of us, "For out of the heart comes come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." When you suddenly find yourself in the presence of God as Peter, James and John did, you became gripped with fear because you know how far short you fall of God's glory.

What peace and comfort we find today in hearing the Father say of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." The Father looked at the life of Jesus and never saw evil in his heart, or unkind words spoken to other people. Never once did Jesus fail to honor his father and mother growing up in Nazareth. The Father was pleased with the perfect life that Jesus lived for you, and he was further pleased with the perfect death that Jesus died for you. He showed he was pleased by raising Jesus to life again. He is the Vine, and now we are the branches attached to him. Everything Jesus did that was pleasing to the Father is now yours and the Father can say the same to you, because of what you have in Jesus. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Lord it is good to be here! It is good to be in this place where we know we are loved through Jesus and where we know that nothing can separate us from this life.

The disciples fell with their faces to the ground when the Father spoke, but then they heard the soothing voice of Jesus say, "Do not be afraid!" We are told they looked up, and then all they saw was Jesus. We have glorious moments in life when we see beautiful things from God's creation, or the birth of a child, or close moments with our families, and we have moments when these things may be taken away from us. But always we have Jesus. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has promised us, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." It was Job who once said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Lord, it is good to be here, good to be in this place, this spot, this position of faith where we know Jesus is always there with us.

It is good to share Jesus glory

Once you have see Jesus' glory, you want to let other people know what you have seen so they can share in that glory that is yours. At first we may wonder why Jesus told Peter, James and John not to tell anyone what they had seen. "Don't tell anyone what you have

seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Can you think of any reasons why Jesus said not to tell others until after the resurrection? Can't you hear people accusing them of dreaming or being overcome by emotions or telling a story because they thought they were better than other disciples who followed Jesus?

The resurrection of Jesus changed all that. Once people saw the risen body of Jesus with nail marks in his hands, they were ready also to hear the account of what happened on this mountain. It was Peter who wrote in one of his letters, "We ourselves heard this voice when we were with him on the holy mountain." Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Peter, James and John could witness to what they saw on the mountain and other people would not think they were strange or just seeing things or making up stories.

It is good to be here and to share with each other the glory we have seen together in Jesus. It is good to gather together such as we are doing here in this worship service and seeing more of the glory of Jesus shining brightly in our lives. Life on this earth is not always easy. Some of you would certainly agree after another hard week of life on this earth. What a privilege it is to gather around Jesus and see his glory and even have him give us his body and blood with bread and wine in the Holy Sacrament. "Lord it is good to be here!" Amen.