

March 2, 2014
Transfiguration Sunday

"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."

You are traveling through one of our great national parks and you come to an area that has been devastated by a massive wildfire. There are places along the road that you can pull over and view the scenery more closely. However, you don't want to stop. You can't stand to see the destruction of trees and shrubs and flowers and streams. You keep driving and crest the summit and suddenly everything changes. Devastated and burnt over forests give way to large green trees, wild flowers, bubbling streams and snow covered mountains in the distance. You see a place to pull over and feast your eyes on the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

So it was with Jesus. As they traveled toward Jerusalem, he told his disciples of the terrible devastation and destruction that would come to him when he would be condemned and beaten and killed on the cross. How did Peter react to Jesus vivid and heart rending description of his future pain and suffering? He said, "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you." Six days later Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him up a mountain and gives them a view of his glory that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives. No national park with its green trees and waterfalls and meadows of flowers and snow capped mountains could even begin to compare to the glory they were privileged to see in Jesus. Peter captured the glory of that moment with words that stick with us, "Lord, it is good to be here!"

Lord it is good to be here! It is good to see your glory. We get tired and weary of seeing the culture around us become more and more devastated and destroyed by the ravages of sin. We look into our hearts and find ourselves confessing with Abraham, "I am ashes and dust." And then Jesus takes us up to the mountain to be alone with him. He allows us to see his glory and we say with Peter, "Lord, it is good to be here!" Lord, it is good to have this place where we see your glory.

What sights we see

What sights our sore eyes are privileged to see. "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and lead them up a high mountain." Jesus led them up the mountain. The Greek word is also used for carrying something. When I get tired and weary of life around me and life within me, then I long for Jesus to carry me and lead me to those special

places where I can see his glory. Think of all those times in your past life where Jesus has led you and carried you to special places where you have seen his glory more clearly.

"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Jesus was transfigured before them. Suddenly Jesus who looks like an ordinary human being is shining in glory. The gospel of Luke says his clothes flashed like lightning. Have you ever been close, real close, to a flash of lightning? I have and it is quite a display of glory.

The word for transfigured is metamorpheo from which we get our word metamorphosis. I recall my second grade teacher telling us how the green caterpillar goes through a metamorphosis and becomes a beautiful butterfly. How could we ever forget that amazing change we saw when one of the kids brought a green caterpillar on a milkweed plant? We placed it in a dry aquarium. We watched it munch the leaves, make a chrysalis for itself and transform into a beautiful Monarch butterfly.

A science teacher from our local Hancock College wrote in the Santa Maria Times that he was concerned about the students in his class who foolishly believe in God's creation as the reason things are the way they are. How can you not believe in design when you observe the scientific evidence for a designer that you see when the green caterpillar transforms into the Monarch butterfly?

Here is Jesus allowing his disciples to see him in his glory as the Monarch of all creation, King of kings and Lord of lords. He does not reflect the glory of God as the moon reflects the glory of the sun. He radiates his glory as God as his face shines like the sun and his clothes are white as light. The book of Hebrews says of Jesus, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful Word." Later on John would write, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Peter would later write, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

When you find yourself traveling through this life and overwhelmed by the wasteland that surrounds you and wasteland inside of you then it is time to let Jesus take you to the mountain where you can see his glory. One of the things we never, ever want to forget about Jesus is that he is Lord and God from all eternity. Yes, he is one of us with skin, bones, hair, flesh and needs similar to ours. Yet, he is our Lord and God. That means the very real pain and suffering he endured on the cross can count for our payment for sin because he is our God. As your Lord and God Jesus has the power to come into your life, knock on your door, and then bring into your life the forgiveness and peace with God that only he can provide. If Jesus were not God everything he did for us at the cross would have no meaning and value.

Did you hear about that retired couple in the Northern California gold country who found some old buried tin cans on their property and they were filled with gold coins worth over 10 million dollars. The gold coins were in mint condition, never used. I have to admit that gold coins have often fascinated me. They have a lasting value to them. All that gold could not pay for one small sin. Jesus shines forth as our Lord and God. He is our greatest treasure. You can say with Peter and John, we have seen his glory as God. I have a Savior who has lasting value, whose forgiveness and promises and home in heaven will not fail me.

Peter, James and John saw more. They saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. One of the other gospel accounts said that were talking about Jesus departure, his death on the cross. Moses saw God's glory on Mount Sinai. Elijah saw the Lord's glory come down like fire from heaven and consume the sacrifice. These prophets are there with Jesus and talking to him. They are experiencing an even greater glory.

Can't you see the eyes of Peter, James and John wide open with wonder and amazement at the glory that is right there in front of them? In fact Peter is so amazed and so overwhelmed that he blurts out, "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." Peter is not being silly and foolish. He wants these special moments with Jesus to last and last.

What will it be like someday in heaven to see Jesus face to face in all his glory? When that time comes we won't have to be concerned about preserving the moment or making it last or even taking a picture of it to help us remember. As we sing in the hymn, "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise, Then when we first begun."

Jesus is also planning many beautiful places here on this earth where he allows us to see glimpses of his glory. When I lived in Tucson, I met a man who told me about a hidden canyon he had discovered up in the mountains that few people had ever seen. He said that it was such a beautiful place that it brought tears to his eyes. Jesus has better places planned for you.

Jesus is walking along with you. He comes alongside of you as you go through the valleys of devastation and darkness and despond. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me, Thy rod and they staff they comfort me." Jesus says, "Come with me to the mountain. Let me show you in my Word things about me that will take your breath away. Let me overwhelm you and bring tears to your eyes as you see my glory and realize how much I love you and care for you." And so we say with Peter, "Lord, it is good to be here."

What sounds we hear

Sights now give way to sounds and amazing sound. As a bright cloud envelops them, the disciples fall down with their faces to the ground. This is the heavenly Father coming to them in the cloud and they are afraid. The mighty God says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him." Later Peter would write about this sound of the Father's voice from heaven: "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on that sacred mountain."

God our heavenly Father is speaking to us this morning and telling us how pleased he is with the life his Son Jesus is living. We pull along the road of life, we stop as we carrying our cross up the mountain, and we listen to what our heavenly Father tells us about his Son. The Father says, "I am pleased with the life my Son is living." After Jesus died for all our sins, the Father showed us he was pleased with the death Jesus died for our sin by raising him to life again. I can find nothing in myself that is pleasing to God. Sample any part of our life and you will always fall short of God's glory. As we said last Sunday, fall short of God's glory is not just shooting in the air wildly in all directions. It is failing to hit the bull's eye 100% of the time. The Father tells us Jesus passed the test and his marks are straight A pluses and all 100%. That's the source of our salvation. The Father wants me to listen to Jesus and love every word that Jesus tells me here in this book, this Holy Bible, these sacred Scriptures.

"Jesus came touched them." Jesus told them not to be afraid. When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus. Jesus is all they needed. Jesus is all we need. Jesus has all these stops and pull outs quiet places where he has planned for you to see his glory. "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" Amen.