

Transfiguration of Our Lord – February 26, 2017

Matthew 17:1-9

1 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.”

Have you ever wished that you were somewhere else? After the snowstorm on Friday, a few of us may have had those thoughts. Probably somewhere further south, perhaps on a beach or a golf course, able to enjoy the warm sunshine. “Wanna Get Away” has become a tagline for Southwest Airlines and he has been used over the years for their TV commercials. People found themselves in embarrassing situations and the question is asked, “want to get away?” We do not like situations where people are staring at us or making fun of us for the mistakes we have made. We just wish we were somewhere else. In our sermon text, Peter, James and John however did not share that feeling. They did not wish they were somewhere else or want to get away. Instead, Peter said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” We share that sentiment with the disciples this morning/evening as we worship and study God’s word and see that **It Is Good for Us to Be Here**. First **because we see his glory** and second **because we are not afraid**.

Verse 1: “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.” It was probably about two-thirds of the way through Jesus’ three-year public ministry and Jesus took some time away from the crowds. He brought his three closest disciples to a mountain, which one we are not sure, so that he could give them a special glimpse of his glory in three different ways.

First, verse 2: “There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” To transfigure means to transform or to change, the related word in English is metamorphosis. The idea is one of complete and sudden change. Examples from nature would include a caterpillar entering into a cocoon and exiting as a butterfly or that of a tadpole becoming a frog. Jesus here was giving the disciples a glimpse of his glory, a peek behind the curtain, so to speak. With a face shining like the sun and clothes white as light, he was revealing that he was no ordinary man, but was the Son of God.

Further proof of glory came in verse 3: “Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.” Why these two men and what they were talking about is not mentioned here. But these men, these pillars of the Old Testament, made an appearance to confirm that Jesus was special and worthy of such attention.

The final glimpse of glory came in verse 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!’” As these disciples knew, God often made his appearance in the Old Testament in the form of a cloud, referred to as the Glory of the Lord, as mentioned in our

first lesson from Exodus (24:16). He did so at this time to confirm the glory of Jesus and repeat what he had said at his baptism. This man was his beloved Son—they were to listen to him because he had important news to share with them.

Why were these disciples shown this glimpse of Jesus' glory? Peter reveals why in our second lesson taken from chapter 1 of his second letter: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pe 1:16). The message that men like Peter and John and later Paul would spread about Jesus was not just that he was a great man, but that he was God, they had witnessed it with their own eyes. It was not a legend or myth that they had created. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pe 1:21).

Even still today many in this world would try to downplay the glory of Jesus. They would say that the miracles recorded in Scripture were just cleverly invented stories used to make Jesus seem more important than he really was. Sure, he was a great man, a great teacher with many good things to say, a great martyr who sacrificed himself for his beliefs, but that's all. After all, in our world of reason and science, displays like this transfiguration cannot really be explained as anything other than myth or legend.

But do not be fooled by the rationale of this world, do not let this glory be downplayed, because it is crucial to our being saved. If this transfiguration did not really happen, if Jesus was not really God's Son, then we are still lost in our sins and condemned to an eternal death in hell. Jesus did have to be man to take our place by living under the law and dying on the cross. But he had to be God to do both of those two things perfectly—perfectly obeying the law and making his death count for everyone. It is good for us to be here, to witness this glory of our Lord, because it proves that Jesus is who he claims to be, our Savior.

Despite the fact that Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," the response of the disciples was one of fear. Verse 6, after the God the Father had spoken in the cloud: "When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified." They could not quite understand everything that was happening, but they knew enough to be terrified of God's presence. To see God in his presence meant risking death. For the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, it was a scary sight. "To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (Ex 24:17). When Moses was gone for forty days, they feared that he had not survived, that he would not be coming back. Perhaps the disciples were frightened that they had crossed the line and now risked death.

Another part of their fear shows in Peter's response to seeing Moses and Elijah in verse 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.'" This was not a fear of terror, but a fear of the unknown. Peter knew that this moment was special and did not want to leave. He wanted to stay there and build shelters to preserve this mountaintop experience, rather than go back down and have to face the world again. Just before this Jesus had predicted his death, something that Peter was certainly not looking forward to or wanting to happen.

We too have these same fears. We would have that same terrified reaction if God appeared before us in his awesome presence. That terror would be even greater if he appeared as we were in the middle of committing sins, breaking his laws right in front of his divine presence. Too often we forget that God is watching our every move and although we do not visibly see his presence, he is witness to every sinful thing we think, do or say.

Then there is that fear of the unknown, the things to happen in our lives. We would be content to sit here in church, our comfort zone, our mountaintop experience so to speak, if that meant not having to face the problems of sin and the problems of this world—the unexpected death, the unexpected illness, the unexpected family or financial problems. At times we may feel scared to go out and live our lives, not knowing what is going to happen next.

But listen to Jesus' response in verse 7: "But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'" The disciples had nothing to fear, and neither do we, because of the fact that Jesus was leaving that mountain. He would go on to Jerusalem, to Calvary's cross, to make payment for our sins. We have no need to fear our God's judgment, because Jesus paid the price and his perfect life is now ours.

As for the fear of the unknown, the unexpected things we face in our lives, Jesus has taken care of that as well. We have nothing to fear. In John chapter 14(1-4), he comforted his disciples on that Maundy Thursday evening before his death: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." As we face those unexpected potholes on our road of life, we do so knowing that Jesus is by our side and will bring us through them to our heavenly home.

Do you want to get away? Hopefully you're not thinking that after having sat through yet another one of the pastor's sermons. It is truly good for us to be here as we worship and study God's Word. We are able to see Christ's glory, the fact that he was both God and man, able to save us from eternal death. We are not afraid to leave here and live our lives and face our fears because that same Christ is by our side along the way. As they were leaving the mountain, Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone about this until after his resurrection (v. 9). Well, it's now after his resurrection, so let's go out and share the good news with those who need to hear it. Amen.