

Transfiguration – March 3, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Luke 9:28-36 (NIV)

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. (29) As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. (30) Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. (31) They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. (32) Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. (33) As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) (34) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. **(35) A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."** (36) When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Dear Friends,

So what's next – what does the future hold? That's what the disciples must have been wondering in the days before the events of this text took place. Life had been interesting for them after they left their fishing boats to follow Jesus and catch men. It seemed as if there was always a new adventure waiting right around the corner. There was always something more to learn from Jesus and about Jesus.

The disciples had been following Jesus for about 2 and half years. Fairly recently Jesus had sent them on a preaching and healing mission in the villages of Galilee. The activity of Jesus and the disciples was creating quite a stir among the people. Even the ruler of Galilee, King Herod was wondering about Jesus. Large crowds sought out Jesus to hear him speak about the kingdom of God and heal the sick. On one occasion, five thousand men followed Jesus and his disciples to the remote area around the village of Bethsaida. Jesus spent the day preaching and healing. Before he dismissed the crowd for the day, he miraculously provided food them by turning five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to satisfy all the people with twelve baskets of food left over.

The crowds of people had their opinions about Jesus -- "Some thought he was John the Baptist (come back to life); others said he was Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life." The disciples had their opinions of Jesus too.

About eight days before the events of our Jesus was praying privately and his disciples were with him. He took advantage of the opportunity to speak with them about the future. He wanted them to understand why he had come into the world and to learn to place their futures in his hands. He asked them, **"Who do you say I am?"** Peter spoke for the group and declared, **"You are God's Messiah."**

While that was definitely an accurate assessment, there was still some misunderstanding amongst the disciples as to the significance of that fact. You see, they had been taught in their youth to believe that when the Messiah (or Christ as we more commonly say) came, he would unite the people of Israel and establish his kingdom. His rule would be marked not only by peace, but also by also great prosperity. This misunderstanding of the Messiah and his kingdom caused many to turn away from Jesus.

Jesus wanted to make sure that the disciples understood that the Kingdom he had come to establish was different and greater than anything they had experienced. Jesus explained how he would establish his Kingdom.

He told them, **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** (*Luke 9:22 NIV*).

The Christ would establish an eternal kingdom by giving up his life for a world of sinners, to rescue them from the punishment that they deserved. Then he would victoriously rise again in defiance of sin, death and the Devil. Jesus also told them that they would suffer, too. **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.** (*Luke 9:23 NIV*).

That's what led to those questions which were on their minds: So what's next – what does the future hold? Maybe you have similar questions on your minds.

The Transfiguration of Jesus prepared Peter, James and John to cope with his crucifixion and resurrection. It gave them assurances for their immediate future and glimpse of their eternal glory. Jesus' transfiguration helped disciples understand who he was and that it was necessary to pay attention to him.

Jesus' Transfiguration Helps Us to Understand.

- 1 Jesus is not to be pitied, but praised**
- 2. That Jesus is to be heard not dismissed**

Jesus had just spoken of his impending death. Imagine how those words must have turned the disciples' opinions of Jesus upside down. There must have been some sadness as they realized that Jesus might be right. The jealousy and hatred of the Jewish leaders was no a secret. Maybe they actually would be successful in their efforts to get rid of Jesus. Don't you suppose the disciples might have felt sorry for Jesus? He didn't deserve rejection; he certainly didn't deserve to be put to death.

Jesus knew the sorrow that the disciples were feeling. He knew the pity that they had for him. It seemed as if the Jewish leaders; who were interested only in safeguarding their own authority were cutting Jesus' career short. Jesus had to help them understand so that they didn't see him simply as a tragic figure who never accomplished the full extent of his goals. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to help them understand.

Jesus demonstrated to his disciples, in dramatic fashion, that he would not die because the mighty leaders of the Jews were jealous and he couldn't escape their murderous plot. **As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.** The appearance of his face was altered in some way and his clothes were brighter than anything anyone had ever seen. The message is unmistakable. Jesus is not just a man. His glory as God was on display. He is the all-powerful God; he has the power to avoid suffering and death. He has the power to destroy all of his enemies. His suffering and death, then, would not be the result of his weakness or of the intense hatred of the Jewish leaders, but because of his willingness to carry out his Father's plan for the salvation of the world. This is how he would establish his eternal Kingdom.

The Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah spoke of the Glory of the Lord's salvation during the days of their life on this earth. As the disciples were captivated by Jesus' glory suddenly **Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. (31) They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.**

If he had the authority to summon Moses and Elijah from heaven to come and speak with him, then he certainly had the power to avoid arrest. If he suffered and died, it would not be because he couldn't avoid it, but because he wanted to do so. What's more, Moses and Elijah talked about Jesus' departure, his exodus from this

world. That was clear testimony to Peter, James, and John that his suffering and death was not contrary to the will of God, contrary to the blueprints in heaven, but completely in accord with it. Jesus was not to be pitied, but praised as the one who would provide salvation for a world of sinners.

While the Lord was trying to teach his disciples that he would suffer because of his love for the world, they were fading in and out of sleep. When they finally woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and they saw Moses and Elijah standing with him. Their first thought must have been, "This is more like it. Finally, he has chosen to use his power. This is the life we were anticipating when we dropped our nets, left everything, and followed him." However, at that very moment, it became apparent that the glory was coming to an end. Moses and Elijah were preparing to leave. Peter saw what was happening and came up with a proposal: "**Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.**" Luke tells us that Peter didn't know what he was saying. Moses and Elijah didn't need a tent or place to stay – this world was not their eternal dwelling place. They were not going to stay on the mountain, because Jesus wasn't going to stay there. He was going to Jerusalem to die – not because he wasn't strong enough to resist death, but because he was focused on the world's redemption.

The transfiguration was to be, for the disciples, a perspective-altering event. They thought Jesus should be pitied, because those horrible Jews were going to put him to death and there was no way for Jesus to avoid it. The Transfiguration tells a different story. Jesus would not die because of the power of the Jewish leaders or his inability to stop their attack, but because he wanted to die. Jesus is to be praised, not pitied.

The Transfiguration demonstrates, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is God. Jesus had the power to resist arrest. He chose not to use that power. So don't pity him. If all we do is pity him, and feel sorry for him that he had to endure such horrible things, we are actually insulting Jesus. Then we are seeing him as nothing more than a mere human being. But he's not just a human being. He is also the all-powerful God. He chose to put aside the full use of his power as God because he wanted to die for the sins of all people of all time, for your sins and mine. Because he's God, his suffering and death count for all people of all time. There's absolutely no reason to pity Jesus. There's every reason to praise Jesus.

While the Scriptures make it clear that our sin caused his suffering and death, the emphasis of the Scriptures is the willingness with which Jesus suffered. Let me state this most simply – Jesus didn't die to make us feel bad. He died to make us glad. He died to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life.

Jesus' Transfiguration Helps Us to Understand.

2. That Jesus is to be heard not dismissed

Have you ever had a conversation with someone whose face, you were convinced, belonged next to the word "pessimist" in the dictionary? Talk to a true pessimist and everything in the world is horrible and rotten. So what do you do when you have heard someone tell you how everything is horrible and everyone is against them? Don't their words go in one ear and out the other? We simply dismiss their ranting and raving.

I wonder if at times the disciples didn't feel that way about their friend and teacher Jesus and the repeated predictions of his death. "Here he goes again," they might have said as they rolled their eyes, "talking about how he's going to die." They dismissed what he had to say because it went against their view of things. They just couldn't see how such a good man who had done so many good things could be put to death. Even though it was obvious that the leaders of the Jews didn't like Jesus, that didn't automatically mean that they would resort to violence. Add to that the fact that the people seemed genuinely to appreciate Jesus and his power, and it seemed that Jesus' predictions of his death were best dismissed as the words of a pessimist who was simply frustrated by the rejection of the Jewish leaders.

After seeing his glory, Peter, James, and John had even more reason to dismiss Jesus' words as just "pessimistic." That's why God the Father stepped in. He wanted to help them understand. It began with a cloud. **While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.** In the OT times, you may remember, God made his presence known to his by a cloud. When the people of Israel were leaving the land of Egypt, the Lord led them with a pillar of cloud by day. When God gave the Law to his people on Mt. Sinai, a cloud covered it. The cloud on the mountain was meant to send a message to the disciples: "God is present with you and has something to say to you about what you are thinking."

In the following verse, we hear what the Lord had to say: **"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."** God himself weighed in on the matter. They were not to dismiss what Jesus had said about his suffering, death and resurrection or anything else for that matter. Listen to him. He even gives reasons why they should listen to him. First, he says, "He is my Son." That is to say, "He is God." Ignoring Jesus is turning a deaf ear to God. It is breaking the first commandment. It is idolatry. The person who dismisses what Jesus says makes himself his God. The Lord gives a second reason to listen to Jesus when he describes him as the one he has chosen. That is to say, "He is the Christ. He is the Messiah promised on the pages of the Old Testament. He is the Prophet greater than Moses that I said I would send." Since he is the Christ, and therefore the Prophet, all ears should be tuned to everything he says.

The Transfiguration was meant to help Peter, James, and John, better understand who Jesus was and to gain a more complete understanding of why he had come into this world. Jesus is not to be dismissed, but heard and believed. Since Jesus is God and he is the Prophet, everything he says is to be trusted. So, when Jesus tells us that we will face suffering because of our connection with him, we ought not dismiss that as unfair, considering all that we have given up for him. Yet, how often haven't we grumbled about the trials we face in life, thinking that Jesus should give us better. When Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God, to make his Word a priority in our lives, we cannot dismiss that. He is to be trusted. Too often, though, we do dismiss the study of his Word as unnecessary, since we think we know what we need to know and that we don't really need to know anymore.

Because we have dismissed the Lord Jesus and his word in these and other ways, we deserve to be dismissed ourselves. If Jesus had thought about how we would respond to his word and determined on that basis whether or not to go to the cross, there would never have been a crucifixion. Had Jesus considered our thankfulness and our obedience in deciding whether or not to offer his life into death, there would have been no passion of Christ. But Jesus thought only of our redemption, exclusively of our forgiveness. That's why he allowed himself to be punished. That's why he gave up his life – to take away our sin and cover us in righteousness before his Father.

When we know the Savior's love for us and his gracious forgiveness of all our sin, we want to listen to him. The Transfiguration account has helped us to better understand Jesus. We have learned not to pity him but to praise him as our Savior. We do not want to dismiss anything of what he says in his word, even if it is hard to understand, even if it disagrees with our experience. We hear what he says and we believe it. That is the key to the Christian life: listening to Jesus instead of dismissing him. When he says that our sins have been forgiven and that we don't have to carry around a burden of guilt, we listen and we believe. When he says that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us, we listen and we believe. When he promises to be with us in good and bad, we listen and we believe.

We're ready now. We're ready for the forty days of Lent. We're ready to watch the Lord Jesus suffer and die. The Transfiguration has helped us to understand. The Transfiguration assures us that Jesus suffered out of love for our souls. He suffered and died, not because he was weak and powerless, but because he was strong. And that also makes us ready to face whatever the future may hold. Amen.