

Transfiguration Sunday – March 3, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 17:1-9 (NIV)

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 covered 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."

Dear friends in Christ:

Sometimes it's just nice to get away and enjoy some time alone – time alone tends to be a great stress reliever for many people. Many find it relaxing to find a quiet stream or lake for a few hours of fishing. Others enjoy a peaceful walk through the woods – hiking or hunting. Maybe some of you enjoy a relaxing bubble bath or curling up with a good book. We seek out such retreats to escape the hubbub and hassle of our daily routines.

Believe it or not Jesus and his disciples also felt the stress of their daily routines. Six days prior to the events of our text Jesus had engaged his disciples in a rather solemn and serious conversation about himself and his future relationship with them. It was heavy stuff. It was a conversation which took a number of twists and turns. Jesus began by questioning his disciples about who people said he was. They told him what people were saying; **"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15) "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (Matthew 16:14-16) Jesus responded by saying that Peter's confession was the foundation on which his church would be built.

And then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. **And from that time on Jesus spoke with his disciples about the things that would happen to him in Jerusalem: 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.** (Matthew 16:21) Well that was more than Peter could bear – finally he had enough of it all and blurted out: **"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23) 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."** (Matthew 16:22-23) These were some tense times for Jesus and his disciples.

And now **after six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.** We can never know for sure what was going through the minds of those three disciples as they hiked up that mountain slope with Jesus but they must have been wondering what

this was all about. Most likely their emotions were mixed as they wondered if Jesus was going to tell them more about what would happen to him and what it would mean for them. I doubt that they had any inkling of what would take place on that mountain top and I wonder just how good they felt about the journey.

But Jesus knew what they needed and what he needed. They needed some time away with him – not to enjoy some rest and relaxation – but time away to enjoy the kind solitude that could only be found in a place like that rugged mountain area. A place where they would be from distractions, a place where Jesus could have quiet time for prayer and reflection together with his disciples. Ultimately it would be a place where Jesus and his disciples would receive divine encouragement. It would be a place where they would see God's glory, enjoy a glimpse of heaven and hear God speak.

Surely as we think about this we realize that there are times when we need places like that. We live fast paced, hectic, chaotic lives – we need to have a place where we can get away, where we can shut off the hubbub of life and enjoy some time alone with Jesus – seeing his glory and hearing his voice. For Jesus and his disciples it was, on this occasion, a mountain top. For us today, now, it's the quiet sanctuary of our little church building. At other times it may be in the privacy of our homes or a quiet area in nature where we can spend time undisturbed with God and his Word.

Theme: It is Good to be Alone With Jesus

1. To witness His glory
2. To enjoy a glimpse of heaven
3. To listen to God's Word

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.

The sight is hard to describe with words, but the Spirit inspired Scriptures get the point across. A miraculous change overcame Jesus – his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach them, as bright as a flash of lightening and his face was as blinding as the sun. Now the disciples were seeing what they had heard from Jesus. Jesus had told them he was God. He had demonstrated that fact with the miracles he had performed. But now six days after he had explained the need for his humiliation and spoken in no uncertain terms to them of his suffering, death, crucifixion and resurrection – they saw his divine splendor and majesty shining through his human nature in a most amazing way. Peter and the other two were eyewitness of Jesus' majesty – there was no need to doubt what he had told them about himself and his resurrection. It's obvious the full impact of this event didn't sink home immediately.

It's hard to know what was more amazing to Peter, to James and to John, the glorious appearance of Jesus or the fact that there before them were Moses and Elijah – two OT believers talking with Jesus. Dear friends that was truly a little glimpse of heaven on earth. It's no wonder that Peter exclaimed it's good for us to be here and it's no wonder why he wanted to preserve the 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."**

Dear friends look around you and see the glory of God. No, there's no bright, shining faces, there's no one come back from the dead – but God's glory is on display here. You and I are evidence of his glory – sinners by nature, people who are often confused about things and who at times like Peter can't see the things of God because we are overly concerned about things of men – that's what we are. But what has God done for us? He has called us to faith in his Son and declared that we are a holy people as Peter reminds us: (1 Peter 2:9-10) **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10) Once you were not**

a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Now the Scriptures speak of us as the body of Christ and remind us to see each other as a vital part of God's family. As we behold that amazing grace of God – which has made us all members of his family and heirs of eternal life that's God's glorious ways shining through. As we gather together to praise our Lord and sing his praises – we have a foreshadowing – a glimpse of the fellowship of believers that we will enjoy in heaven where we will be face to face with our Lord and Savior in all of his glorious splendor. We have a little taste of heaven.

As we gather together as God's children God speaks to us through his word. It's good to be here with our brothers and sisters in Christ to behold in them and with them the glory of God and to hear God speak to us.

Before anyone could respond to Peter's suggestion about building shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah God himself entered the conversation. **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!"**

God speaks to us today, not from a bright cloud, but from the pages of Holy Scripture. Today God uses those Scriptures to point us to his Son, the one who pleased him by following his will perfectly in our place. The Scriptures point us to the one who paid for our sins with his holy, innocent sufferings and death. The Scriptures remind us of the fellowship we have with God through him. Listen to him as you listen to the Scriptures and as you live according to them.

The disciples heard the Father speak from the cloud and it was a terrifying experience for them. **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."**

Suddenly the glorious event was over and once again they were alone with Jesus – the one who displayed his glory as true God. Sinful human beings are afraid of the holy, almighty God. Even minor demonstrations of his power like an approaching tornado or the eruption of a volcano can cause people to drop to their knees in fear. Peter, James and John reacted according to their sinful human nature when they heard God speak. They were scared out of their wits. In love God reaches out to them as Jesus goes to them and touches them, calming their fears. **"Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."**

Today Jesus says the same to us. As we bow down before God – humbly confessing our sins, he says to us: Get up, don't be afraid, your sins are forgiven. And we rejoice to hear his words. Eagerly we wait for his next words. And as we participate in worship those words come to us from the Holy Scriptures from the Psalms, from the OT lessons, the Epistle Lessons and the Gospel writings. Those words bid us to believe in Jesus to live as his children to let him set aside our fears, to call upon him in time of need, to praise him for his marvelous works to rejoice in our status as God's children and to work together to praise his holy name.

As [Peter, James and John] 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." Jesus had not as yet completed the work he had been chosen and appointed to do as the Christ. He had not as yet been **declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.** (Romans 1:4) Until then they were to keep this information to themselves.

But that's no longer the case. Following his resurrection from the dead Jesus took his disciples to another mountain top where he gave them and us the instructions: (Mark 16:15) **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."** Jesus says to us: (Matthew 28:18-20) **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Jesus promises to be with us, to empower and equip us to be his witnesses, to live as his children, to proclaim his praises as we gather together with each other in his name. It's no wonder the sacred writer reminds us: (Hebrews 10:23-25) **Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...**

It's good for us to be alone with Jesus. Peter wanted to freeze time and to remain on that mountain top with Jesus and Moses and Elijah. Perhaps we've felt that way too – that it would be nice if we could remain alone in a solitary place with the Lord even now. But that was not possible for the disciples and it will not be possible for us either. Soon our time away from the hubbub of life will be over and Jesus will come with us to the plain. He'll come with us as we go out into the world to take on our busy schedules and challenging activities with renewed vigor and confidence in his blessings.

You may be ready to go to heaven now and be reunited with loved ones but for some reason, you're still here. When you are having one of those "poor me days," think about the Transfiguration. It won't make your journey to heaven any shorter or easier but when you see Jesus glorified on that sacred mountain, and Elijah and Moses gleaming too you'll be encouraged because you'll be reminded that glory is coming!

And as we go about our affairs with the Lord's help, let's not forget that it was good to be here with Jesus to witness his glory, to enjoy a glimpse of heaven and to listen to God's word. Let's not make the mistake that is so often made after people say, "It's good to be here, we ought to do this more often." All too often those reunions fail to take place -- too much time passes before the groups and families get together again. Don't let that happen when it comes to being alone with Jesus.

Jesus' transfiguration helped to prepare his disciples for the journey they would take with him as he walked the path to the cross and his resurrection. Once again the Holy Spirit has used these events to prepare us for our Lenten Journey with Jesus – a journey which we will commemorate in our special midweek Lenten services.

It was good for us to be here today to behold Jesus' glory, to enjoy a glimpse of heaven and to listen to God's word. We can repeat that same experience each time we gather here in the Lord's house to worship him. Jesus will be here on Wednesday to reveal his glory and to speak to you. Jesus will be here next Sunday to reveal his glory and to speak to you. Jesus will be here. Will you? It will be good to be here with Jesus. Amen.