

Transfiguration of our Lord
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Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Matthew 17:1-9
David McMinn
Read by Jim Frysinger

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from the One who is, who was and who is to come even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration today is from Gospel according to St. Matthew the 17th chapter.

“Rise, and have no fear...” Says our Lord Christ to Peter, James and John after they saw Him in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. The vision and speech the apostles saw was more than their systems could handle. Now we’ve never heard the voice of God. We’ve never seen even a glimpse of His glory. We’ve never been enveloped by the brightness of His radiance. But from this report and from the report of Moses from Mount Sinai it’s obvious that we too would be dumb struck by even this veiled glory of God.

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.”

Jesus tells the face down disciples, "*Rise, and have no fear.*" Easy for Christ to say but hard for them to do. Jesus the man, God in the flesh, they had more or less gotten use to. They believed Him to be the Messiah, but He usually didn't frighten them. Occasionally, after He performed some miracle they had moments of uneasiness around Him, but day in and day out it seems that the apostles weren't frightened by the presence of the Son of God. At least they were use to Him until the day He was transfigured or changed.

That glimpse of Christ's glory, that booming voice of God, that bright light of His presence was more than they could stand. Yes they were chosen by Jesus to be His Apostles and they were even the inner circle of the Apostles. More than anything they were just fallible, common, ordinary sinners. They weren't part of Christ's ministry because they were somehow holier than everybody else. Quite the contrary they were just like everyone else.

Peter, James and John were sinners through and through as the witness of Scripture plainly shows. They didn't deserve to be Jesus' disciples anymore than we do. Yet they were.

Here they don't see Jesus the way they were use to seeing Him. This wasn't the humble carpenter from Nazareth. This wasn't the voice of Joseph speaking about his adopted Son. Here, at the Transfiguration of Jesus; Peter, James and John are confronted with something they hadn't seen before. They were dealing with Christ's glory and it scared them to death.

Mark says that at the sight of the glorified Jesus Peter began to talk about building the booths to shelter Jesus and Elijah and Moses. Mark writes that Peter didn't know what he was saying because he was so frightened. Rightfully

frightened. A sinner before God. A lowly sinner before the majesty of God almighty. Jesus being revealed in His majesty as God is a lot different than just listening to Jesus say He is the Son of God. When He says He's the Son of God He still looks like a lowly man. But when His glory ekes out, well, sinners beware!

Just ask the children of Israel. Moses was gone for forty days and forty nights. That was too long for them to remain faithful. They didn't know what happened to Moses. Maybe he was lost or dead. Whatever, he was gone too long. So they had Aaron cast them a god of gold they could see and touch.

Yes, Moses was God's representative to His people, but he was gone too long. You know what happened next, Moses comes down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God. He sees the golden calf, his anger burns and in his anger he throws down the tablets and breaks them. Later he went back up the mountain and got a new set of tablets inscribed by the finger of God. Exodus says:

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.”

Moses' skin reflected the radiance of God. And he'd not even seen God face to face. God allowed him only to see His back and still Moses' face reflected the bright radiance of God. The golden calf was still fresh in the people's minds. Their grumbling against Moses was still fresh in their minds.

The Israelites knew they were sinners before righteous God and they wanted no part of the glory of God. They didn't want to see it even reflected on Moses' face. The glory of God is deadly to sinners and they knew it. The Israelites had seen what God's wrath could do, they saw it against Pharaoh and they had seen it against themselves. The only thing God's wrath or His Law does for the sinner is to drive them to fall face down before Him.

Is it any different for us? How would we stand before the glory of God reflected? To get an idea all we have to do is pull out God's Law and see how it affects us now. By nature we're not into suffering. We really like our own glory, comfort and ease. See a neighbor in need? It's a shame to see that. Somebody ought to do something to help that fellow. "Me? Oh, I can't. Don't have time, too busy." Church needs cleaning, yard needs mowing, leaves need raking, Sunday school needs to be taught, vacation bible school needs volunteers, and meals need to be cooked. "Man I hope we get enough volunteers, I'm busy by the way."

See God's Law requires that we sacrifice for each other. It requires that you and I sacrifice for the Church. Church, the place where God Himself comes to us with forgiveness and healing in Christ is the most important thing we have. Yet we treat it as one more thing. A couple of more hours for our busy schedule, great! Church is somebody else that needs our "OUR" money. We give time and money begrudgedly. Yet God says Church is life. Christ says the Church is His body and we're all members, living members of Christ. But we say, 'Call us when you've got glory to hand out Lord, suffering and serving just isn't our thing.'

Like the Israelites we're guilty of idolatry. We have other gods. What is it that eats up the bulk of your time? Where is it you put your love and trust? In what do you hope? It really doesn't matter what it is. Hear this: If it moves God aside in the least then we have allowed whatever it is to become our god in part if not in whole.

God calls on us to repent of our sins the same as He called on Israel and the disciples. It's a heart inclined away from God that continues to sin once His Law is revealed. And we must confess that's us. I tell you then repent and be healed. Repent and receive the forgiveness won for you in Jesus Christ.

By itself the Law would drive us to despair before the Almighty God. That's what happened to Peter, James and John. They finally couldn't stand before Christ and His glory. And that's what happens to us when we take God's Law seriously. We can't stand before God. So we spiritually are forced to fall down before Him and admit our sin.

But God doesn't leave you face down in the dirt. Jesus didn't come so that you remain face down, drooling in the dirt babbling. Instead He speaks. He says to you, "*Rise, and have no fear.*" God says, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*" Jesus says, "Because He is pleased with me, He is pleased with you." "*Rise, and have no fear.*" Jesus was sent here not as a warden to keep you under God's thumb. He was sent here to lift you out of the dirt. Your predicament was everlasting despair before holy God. The fix was Christ getting the Law right, all of it. That He has done. What remains is for you to receive Jesus in faith. What remains is for you to hear Him.

The Word Christ has for you is life. He says 'because I live you live also'. Listening to Him replaces our fear of God with faith that loves His Law and seeks to get it right. Listening to Jesus silences the whispering of sin, the world and the devil. It drowns out the temptations to live life in service to our appetites instead of in service to God and our neighbor. Hearing Christ and His Word makes us right with God. It puts away His wrath. It makes you the people God desires. His Word makes you a holy people built on the foundation of Christ.

But all that happens only if you listen to Jesus. Only if you're here receiving His Holy Word. Only if you're here remembering the life giving waters of Holy Baptism. Only if you're here receiving the sin forgiving, faith strengthening body and blood of Jesus. Only if you're here, receiving into your ears the words, "for the sake of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven" does God make you His people.

"Rise, and have no fear." Go back out into that world serving your fellow man, living your life knowing that in Christ God is pleased with you. But return here often. Return here to hear to Jesus. Return here to receive His grace in Word and Sacrament. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.