

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
2 February, Anno Domini 2020
St. Matthew 17:1-9
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It is good to be here. St. Peter is right. It is good to be with Jesus. It was good for them to be there on the mountain, to see the son of Mary transfigured, radiating His divine glory, confirming that prophetic preaching and teaching was about Him. It was good for them to be strengthened and confirmed, to be reassured that what they believed concerning Jesus was not misplaced or misguided.

It is good, it is wonderful, for us to be here this morning in the presence of our Lord, having our ears filled with His word and promises, having our hunger for righteousness satisfied with the food of our Lord's Body and Blood. It is good for us to be here with one another, to confess with one another, to pray with one another, to converse with one another, to share our struggles with one another, to comfort one another.

The frustration, just as it was for the three apostles, is that we can't remain here. Have you ever just wished you could stay here, hearing the Scriptures, praying, singing, and rejoicing? Do you ever cringe at the thought that you have to go back out there and face the bills, sickness, family arguments, hurting marriages, broken cars? It is good to be here. It is good to want to be here just as it is good to want to be in heaven. Sometimes to the frustration and sadness of their loved ones, it is not uncommon that those nearing the end of their earthly lives express a desire to go, a readiness to be with Jesus because that's where they really want to be. They don't want to endure the suffering and sorrow of this life any longer. They long for what was promised them in the font - eternal life, perfect rest, and joy. We prayed in the Introit this morning "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!" There are most certainly times when you just want to run away from all the trouble and the hurt and the heartache. Like Peter, you just want to stay where things are good and peaceful, where Christ's glory isn't hidden from sight. You want to go up on the mountain and leave the mess behind.

Of course, just coming here on Sunday morning doesn't get rid of your problems. They still exist and sometimes those problems are sitting with you in the pew. You are still in the Valley of Baca, the valley of tears. There is death and pain and

heartache. There are bad bosses, harsh parents, mean classmates, another season of elections, an endless string of temptations to steal and lust and hate, and a million other points of pain and anxiety. That is why it is good to be here because Christ is here, right in the middle of all that, with His Word and His Supper, with His comfort and His promises, with His forgiveness and His healing. It is good that you are here because your Lord is here for you offering you the peace that nothing out there can give you.

What an astounding promise our Lord makes when He says “Wherever two or three are gathered together in My Name, there I am in the midst of them.”! Here we are, neck deep in trouble and worry and sadness; here we are, sinners laden down by the terrible weight of our guilt and failure and yet Christ promises to be present in our midst, present with His children who gather together around His things. We long for that Jesus that shone with the brightness of the sun. And rather than saying “Okay, you can be with me but you have to get to me first” that bright, shining, glorious Jesus says “Don’t move. You are injured and tired and in pain. I will come to you as you are, not radiating the majesty of heaven (because that isn’t helpful to you) but wrapped in humility and gentleness. I am present whenever and wherever you hear My Word proclaimed truthfully. I am there as you console one another with My forgiveness. I am there when you wash a sinner clean in Holy Baptism. I am there when you gather your family together around my Word in your homes and pray for one another. I am there with all my mercy and forgiveness when you gather around My table in My house and feast on the food of My very real and very present Body and Blood.” Christ your Lord comes to you bringing with Him the peace and hope you long for and cry out for. He walks the tear-stained valley with you, strengthening your weak knees and drawing your eyes to the joy and glory that await you when your course on earth is run. As we go about our lives, bearing our crosses, trying to make it through each day, here the Lord grants to you a glimpse, a foretaste, of what you are longing for and crying out for. Here, God pulls back the curtain a little and you are reminded what awaits God’s people - the eternal rest and radiance of Christ’s presence, the absence of all tears and sorrow, the end of all our suffering and sadness. Those things will one day be your eternal reality. One day, you too will stand there with Jesus and Moses and Elijah and all the saints who have gone before you enjoying holy conversation in Christ’s unveiled presence. But not yet.

While it was good to be on the holy mountain, and while it is good when our Lord blesses us with moments and glimpses of what lies beyond the grave, it was also good, necessary, that for the time being they left the mountain and Jesus continued on to Jerusalem and the cross. Without His cross there is no comfort. Without His

cross there is no joy. And like Peter and James and John, we must follow if we are to reach the joy of Easter. We too must endure suffering and rejection and persecution with our Lord. There is no other way. If you would join your Lord in His glory, you must join Him first in His death. Indeed, you must be joined to His death which is exactly what Baptism has done. His death is your death. His resurrection is your resurrection. His ascension is but the first of all who will follow.

That is why the Lord gathers you here, to provide you with relief and sustenance on the way. That is why it is good for us to be here. Here Christ lifts your heavy heart by being with you, by speaking to you. He has not left us as orphans. We may not see what the three disciples saw on the holy mountain for ourselves, but we have no less a share in its comfort as we are reminded again that the same Jesus who left the mountain and suffered anguish and violence and betrayal and death is, in fact, contrary to appearance, God's dearly beloved Son with whom the Father is well-pleased. Your Lord fully understands the bitterness and anguish that you suffer. He has cried your tears. He, more than anyone else, is able to sympathize with your weaknesses which is what draws Him to you today. He is present here this day because you live in this harsh and bitter valley and long for the peace and rest of heaven. He is here to hold you up, tend to your wounds, forgive your sins, and strengthen you for the rest of the journey.

And having blessed you, He sends you back down from the mountain because it is also good for you to be at the foot of the mountain, reflecting the radiance of Christ's mercy in the world, bearing witness to the hope that you have and the peace that Christ gives. Yes, that means facing the darkness again - just as Christ didn't remain on the mountain but left and descended into the darkness for us all to redeem us. Only by leaving the brightness of the mount of transfiguration and ascending the dark mount of Golgotha could Christ provide for our resurrection into the eternal brightness of His unveiled presence. And because He descended the mountain and went to the cross, the Lord conquered your death and now comes to bring you life. And there are many still in that darkness who know nothing of the hope that Jesus gives, many who need yet to hear and be gathered to the presence of Christ.

May God grant that as you depart from His house this day, fed and strengthened and forgiven, when you lift up your eyes you see only Jesus - not your sin and not your enemies- only Jesus, who has promised to shepherd you safely through this valley of tears to the glory of eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus.