

The Festival of the Transfiguration of our Lord
24 January, Anno Domini 2021
St. Matthew 17:1-9
Pastor Kurt Ulmer

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

One of the common accusations leveled against Christians is that if we didn't have the Bible, we wouldn't have any evidence that supports our belief that the world was created from nothing in seven literal days by God speaking and everything that flows from that fact. That's true. You and I weren't there when the foundations of the earth were laid. The only way we know how the world was created is the eye-witness account of the one who was there when it happened - namely God Himself who told Moses what happened. Then again, on the basis of those who reported it we certainly believe that the Revolutionary War took place even though none of us witnessed it. It is a matter of faith - which, by the way is exactly what is necessary in order to accept that an organism as complex as a human or even a single cell could randomly evolve from some primordial soup. And, if evolutionists were honest, they would have to confess that no one actually observed a big bang or a whale-like creature ever mutating into a dog-like creature. By strict definition evolution, like creation, is a theory and nothing more that requires faith.

But, like everything else the world does, the motivation isn't truth. Just the opposite. It is silencing the truth because facts and the truth get in the way of what the sinful world wants. Facts and truth are objective and the only way to overcome them is to silence them so no one can hear them. What on earth does this have to do with Jesus' transfiguration? Well, the world would have us believe that unless science can explain something or unless our reason can make sense of it, it must be discarded as voodoo magic because it is harmful. Thus, silly Christians, all your claims about creation, Jesus, the devil, evil, and hell must be contrived, the stuff of children's imaginations woven together to pacify the masses. You have no proof, no evidence, no witnesses. Your only evidence is a book that we all KNOW isn't true. The world, on the other hand, has the all-knowing and all-powerful god called Science. Therefore, O Christian, you need to disavow your archaic and oppressive beliefs that lie at the root of every injustice.

It's tempting, under the avalanche of pressure, to give in - to believe that the world has won the argument, that the Christian faith is a bunch of hogwash. Many have. Many have left the faith completely. Others have tried to create a Christianity that the world will accept. In order to make the world like the Church, many within are trying to gut the Church of the very things that define her - Jesus, the preaching of repentance, the Means of Grace - because the world hates these things. And guess what, the world does approve because suddenly the church isn't any different than the world and isn't exposing the world's evil by shining the bright light of the truth of God's Word on their evil deeds. The world hates God's Word because it hates God and is ruled by the prince of darkness. And it is essential that we do not take this hatred lightly because all who confess the truth are deemed enemies. Even now, there are a growing number of people, some in influential positions who are making publicly known their desire to deprogram you and your children because, so they say, the faith you confess is the epicenter of hatred and social injustice and even white supremacy. Believe them when they tell you what they want to do and recognize that they will use every avenue available to do it - subtle and not so subtle. Sadly, our new president has made clear in his first days in office that he is eager to further erode the true and Biblical understanding of male and female and there are plenty who believe that those who disagree should be excluded from society and punished.

We cannot as the redeemed, who know the Word of truth, bury our heads in the sand and pretend as though these things don't matter or aren't really happening or won't wreak havoc on people's lives directly and indirectly. The world will tell its lies but we as Christians must all the more boldly speak the truth in love for the good of our neighbor. We will pray for President Biden and Vice President Harris and all those in authority that the Lord would give them wisdom and humility. But we will also pray that the will of the wicked would be stopped. We will speak against falsehood and evil. We will repent of our own sin and speak the truth. We have divine truth in Holy Scripture and that truth is our life. We should not be surprised when the unbelieving world hates the truth and tries to silence it by mockery, by intimidation, by punishment, or even by martyrdom. God grant each of us strength and faith that we may endure these things in the full and joyful confidence that the Lord will prevail. May we draw strength from the witness and example of the faithful who have gone before us. May we be ever mindful that the sufferings we endure here cannot be compared to the joys that await all who have been washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

Saints of God, the Word of your Lord isn't insufficient and it hasn't failed. The prophetic witness hasn't failed. We have failed. We have doubted it. We have approached it with skepticism. We have tried to keep it at arm's length so that it can't change our thinking and our lives too dramatically. We have failed to learn it and to submit ourselves to it. As a result, when the accusations and persecutions and questions come we wither away because we have made the decision to only dip our toes in the Word. We fall prey to the world's arguments because we refuse to deeply study and educate ourselves as though serious study of the Word of God is only for academics. But that is exactly why entire church bodies have departed so far from the truth of God's Word and now praise things that are completely contrary to Scripture - because God's children couldn't be troubled to know the Scriptures. As a result, they didn't really know the truth and so they couldn't recognize what was false. They longed for something more exciting and more entertaining. It was too much work and they couldn't be bothered. They preferred the fleshpots of Egypt to the manna which God provides - His Word of life and truth. God tells us what is good and true and healthy because He is a loving God who doesn't delight in watching us walk around in ignorance, falling into the pits of sin and death. We have the sure prophetic word given to Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah and others attesting to what God Himself has spoken. The problem isn't in the reliability of the witness. Every Word of Holy Scripture is a clear and bright light. The problem is that we don't like what it means if that witness is actually true. Our sinful flesh still likes the darkness. It keeps us silent in the face of falsehood. It keeps us in our warm beds while Christ's Word is being proclaimed and Christ is feeding His children with His Body and Blood. It keeps us away from Sunday School and Bible Class because we have made other plans or the current discussion isn't what we want to talk about. It keeps us from confession. It keeps us from reading the Bible at home and praying. We don't like that God demands all of our love and devotion in all things and at all times.

Repent. You need what Christ gives. You need to listen to Jesus. Don't wait for some special revelation or mountain top experience to prove the truth of God's Word and suspect that will get you through. It won't. If we aren't satisfied with what God has spoken, we will fall into unbelief and death. Even if we were blessed to be on the Mount of Transfiguration with the three apostles, we would still be plagued by doubt and unbelief. Why? Because what the prophetic Word says is still true. Our flesh is corrupted by sin and

unbelief. It will never be satisfied, even if we saw Jesus rise from the dead with our own eyes. Every day we are plagued by Satan's question - did God really say - and the doubt of our sinful flesh seeks to gain a foothold and overthrow faith. It wasn't that long after the transfiguration that Peter, who made the foundational confession of faith "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God, turned around and denied even knowing Jesus, the same Jesus whose face he had just seen shining like the sun, pouring forth the true and full glory of God Almighty.

God does really say. He truly does demand for our good that we not despise the preaching of His Word by which He gives us life and teaches us THE truth. He truly does demand that we love our spouse unconditionally until death parts us and that we lead chaste and decent lives in thought, word, and deed. He truly does demand that we never worry, never gossip, never complain, always bear the weaknesses of others. He truly does demand that you call upon Him in every need because He will help you and deliver you. He demands them because they are good and they are good for us. Listen to Moses and repent because these good things you know you haven't done as you ought.

And then listen to Jesus. Listen to His testimony in the water and the blood and the Spirit. Listen to the witness of the apostles and evangelists. Listen to the faithful witness of those who have gone before you in the faith. Because they all bear witness to Him - the Lamb of God who would save you from your doubt and your unbelief. Listen to Jesus who didn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them - to trust only the Word of His heavenly Father, never doubting or wavering, never questioning. He delighted in the Father's will knowing that the Father's will is always good and gracious. And He delighted even more in the Father's promise to save you, to silence the Law's thundering condemnation of you by letting it condemn Him, thereby overthrowing Satan and casting the bright light of truth on the world's evil.

Listen to Jesus. From His mouth comes divine wisdom and understanding. By the mouth of Jesus God does really say that your sins, as black and heinous as they may be, are forgiven. The cross of our Savior lays to rest all the foolishness of the world, all of its vain attempts to glorify itself, all of its stammering about how good and how wise it is. You don't need signs and wonders. You don't need mountain-top experiences. You have a more sure prophetic Word. You have the very words that were spoken by the Son of God

and His promise of His blessing for all those who hear His Word and guard it. You have the Word which promises that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. You have on this altar the New Testament, the new Word of promise, Jesus' Blood for the life of sinners, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins as the Words and promises of God declare.

So let the unbelieving world curse you, revile you, and mock you as a fool. Let them threaten you. But do not let them take the Word of God from you. Bury it so deeply within your heart and the hearts of your children that even if there wasn't a single Bible left on the face of the earth, it would still be an endless fountain of living water flowing out from your heart. The day is surely drawing near when Jesus will return and the senseless, selfish, egotistical yappings of the world will be eternally silenced. You don't need to fear them or bow to their demands of obedience. On that glorious day Satan will no longer be able to harass you and try to stir up the fear of hell in your heart by casting doubt on the promises of Your heavenly Father. Heaven and earth, evolution and abortion, greed and sexual immorality, gossiping and anger will all pass away. But the word of your Savior will never pass away. And when the Lord Jesus appears His truth and glory will be known by everyone and your faith in His Word will be vindicated and those who despised it and reviled it will know themselves to have been the fools. Listen to Jesus. Listen only to Jesus. "Rise and have no fear." The world cannot take your life out of God's hands. It cannot rob you of your Heavenly Father's love and care. This is the sure and eternal Word of the Lord. May His Word comfort your wearied souls, be a light in the darkness of this world, and strengthen you as you go the way of the cross which leads to eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.