

The Transfiguration of Our Lord  
29 January, Anno Domini 2023  
St. Matthew 17:1-9

Sons and daughters of the Most High God,

The Transfiguration of our Lord serves two purposes for the Christian which I want us to focus on this morning. The first, which is highlighted in the Collect of the Day is the promise that it holds forth for the faithful. In Jesus' transfiguration we are given a glimpse of what we will one day enjoy for all of eternity. Though now we are surrounded by great tribulation and God's glory is not visible to us, it will not always be so. There will not always be war or cancer or murder or divorce or slander or false teaching or stealing or pornography. There will come a day for the Christian when there will be no more covering our faces in guilt and shame, no more weeping over the dead, no more foolish and angry words that we wish we could take back. One glorious day we will not have to cry out to God against those who persecute His Word and His Church, against corrupt rulers, or against false teachers. We confess day after day in the creeds that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. One day we will join with Moses and Elijah, Peter and James and John, and all those who have closed their eyes on this earth in faith standing around our Lord Jesus Christ - not as apparitions or spirits but as people, body and soul. We will for all eternity behold Him in all His glory and majesty. We will converse with Him face to face. And we will shine with that same reflected glory which scatters the darkness of sin and death that plague us now. There will be nothing but joy and peace and rest. Notice that the three disciples were able to behold the glory of God - they saw His face and they didn't die! Why? Because it was the face of the God-man, who removed their guilt and their shame. This is the promise that is given to all who believe that Jesus was the Son of God whose death has atoned for sin.

In that sense, Peter was right. It was good to be there. That's why Peter wasn't rebuked for his suggestion. Rather it was simply ignored as a childishly naive suggestion. It is always good to be in the presence of Christ. There shouldn't be anything that we desire more than to be with Christ, the highest good. Nothing should bring us more joy than the thought of dwelling in the unveiled presence of the Lord ever singing His praises as we had been originally created to do. Something is actually quite wrong if we don't, if we can't imagine anything better than what we currently have. If our souls do not long, even faint, for the courts of the Lord we must ask ourselves "Why not? What is so wonderful about this world? Here the devil is constantly stirring men against one another, causing pain and

misery. Here moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Why can't we can't imagine leaving it? What treasure is here that draws our hearts away from yearning to be wrapped in the everlasting joy and peace of heaven? What can we possibly be doing in this world that is more valuable or precious each day than being with each day hearing His Word as we read the Bible; talking with Him as we pray? Why do we stare at phones, watch television, play sports, or gossip about our neighbor instead of gathering our household to be with Jesus?

Peter and James and John were given a very brief glimpse of what John would see much more vividly on the island of Patmos, the great reality that is now hidden from our eyes but that is actually happening right now even as we sit here - the divine rule of Mary's Son over all things in heaven and on earth, the Lamb who was slain sitting at the right hand of God as the One who triumphed over sin and death. And as we sit here we are a part of that scene - the countless number from every tribe and nation and people and language falling down before the Lamb while Christ is marching His victory banner through this valley of the shadow of death, casting out the great beast by announcing the victory of His death and resurrection in your hearing and Satan's and distributing the fruits of His victory in the Holy Supper, imparting to you His very life. We are living in Revelation and in the Transfiguration. The only difference is that we cannot now see it with our eyes.

Beloved of God, your hope is not in vain. Your cries for deliverance from the evils and troubles of this world are heard by God. And in His perfect wisdom, the day will come when the veil of sin and death will be removed from you and you will see the radiant glory of Jesus your Savior.

But what about now?

That is the second point for us to consider this morning. Now we don't see Jesus in His unmitigated glory and power and majesty. Now the heavenly conversation is muted by the dense fog of war. Now the Church looks anything but glorious. Instead we are bruised and beaten, scattered and split by false teaching and the vanity of men. Now it appears to our eyes that the devil is winning all the battles. The wicked world daily tears apart reality so that nothing is certain, nothing is true. In every way it can think of, the world seeks to relegate the Church's preaching to the mad ravings of bigots, misogynists, and fools. The state constantly seeks to establish itself as the sole arbiter of truth and source of good, sticking its nose into the home and Church in ways the Lord never gave it authority to do and to which we need to say "No". Now, Christians bite and tear at one another from behind computer screens and behind each other's backs.

Now, like the three disciples, we must be content to see Jesus only in His humility. Now, with Jesus, we must take up our cross and follow Him to death. We must suffer the persecution and hatred of the world. We must sojourn in these jars of clay that crumble and decay and break. We must wrestle against our own flesh that hates the good and the true and wishes to return to the devil's slavery. Now we must listen to Jesus and live by faith in what He has said. That is the Father's will. "This is My Beloved with whom I am well pleased. LISTEN TO HIM."

You cannot have Jesus now as you want Him, as every Christian wants Him, as Peter wanted Him - shining in glory. But that doesn't mean you can't have Him or be with Him at all. Though the cloud dissipated and Moses and Elijah disappeared and Jesus stopped shining like the sun, Jesus was still there. The vision had been granted, just as John's on Patmos, as a testimony in light of what was coming. That same radiant and glorious Jesus was about to be spit on, blasphemed, struck with fists, scourged, and nailed to a cross to die under God's wrath. Most certainly, all those who followed Jesus would be confused and filled with uncertainty about all that they had heard and believed. They would be tempted to turn their eyes and hearts away from Jesus in shame and in fear. Had He lied? Had He deceived them? Surely the Son of God would not allow Himself to be crucified!

But without that crucifixion there would be no Transfiguration and no promise of ever beholding Jesus in His eternal glory. The way to eternal life would remain closed to us poor, miserable sinners. Neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor anyone else would stand with God in heaven if Peter got his way that day. That is why Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about His exodus - His death that would lead sinners out of bondage to sin and bring them into the promised land of eternal life. They were urging Him on, praising Him for His love and mercy that drew Him to Golgotha. And Jesus continued that same conversation with the disciples, telling them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until the work of salvation was complete and the stone rolled back from the grave. Only then could we understand what happened on that mountaintop.

Though the Lord Jesus has ascended high above all things, yet He remains with us, with you. We don't see Him, but we do hear Him. And that is what the Father commands us to do, to listen to Him. His ascension is not the occasion for speculation but for an even closer adherence to the prophetic and apostolic witnesses. They do not speak their own thoughts but those given to them by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He brought to their remembrance all things that Christ had said and done and inspired them to record EVERYTHING that was

necessary for our salvation. Christ Jesus has so willed and ordered our salvation that He is among us not in the flesh but in the Word. “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name (i.e. by His authority devoting themselves to His Word and His Sacraments) there I am in the midst of them.” So too He said multiple times and in multiple ways to the disciples who were sent to preach the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth “Lo, I am with you always.” “Whoever hears you, hears Me.” “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” And in the Holy Supper, though veiled under the humility of common bread and common wine, there is the true Body and Blood of your Lord, not just representations of them. Jesus. And He is not just standing there, but entering under the roof of your mouth as true food to bestow upon you a share in that radiance and glory which He manifested on the mount of Transfiguration. Where Christ’s Word is, there is Christ, the whole Christ. Not the idea of Christ. Not just the spirit of Christ. The whole Christ...for you.

Listen to Him. Listen to Him declare “It is finished!” Listen to Him declare “Your sins are forgiven.” Listen to Him promise “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will return to take you to be with Myself that where I am, there you may be also.” Listen to Him bid your weary soul “Rise, and have no fear. Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you. Take; eat and drink.” Listen to Jesus. Listen only to Jesus. Listen only to the Jesus who left the glory of the transfiguration to accomplish the glory of your salvation by wrapping Himself in the humiliation and degradation of your sin. Listen to Him as He draws you to gather with the saints who remain here in the valley yet also with the saints who have ascended the mountain as together you gather around the One Christ and with one glorious voice sing His praises. In this way He keeps you and strengthens you to bear your cross so that you might one day join Him in the eternal glory of heaven and with Moses and Elijah and all the saints speak of the glory of His exodus - your salvation - for all eternity.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.