

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Transfiguration of Our Lord A
February 19, 2023
Matthew 17:1-9

'Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, . . . 4 And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here." (Matthew 17:1-2, 4 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

"'Tis good, Lord, to be here." And so it was. Peter, James, and John saw the transfigured Christ in the presence of Moses and Elijah. The sight was too much to behold. Jesus shining in unimagined glory. The light emanating **from** Him, not reflecting off Him. The glory of His divinity shining through His humanity. Then there were Moses and Elijah, the great Law-giver and the great prophet, conversing with Jesus. It's no wonder that Peter declared, "It is good for us to be here." Indeed, it was!

But it wouldn't last forever, even though Peter wanted to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Peter didn't yet understand that Jesus is greater than Moses and Elijah by His very nature. Jesus is the very Son of God in human flesh. Jesus is the one who had come to fulfill what was spoken by the Law and the Prophets, of which Moses and Elijah were the greatest representatives. Jesus had here given a glimpse of the glory of heaven, wherein all the saints of God would one day dwell.

But this glorious scene was not to last. It couldn't if Jesus was going to fulfill the purpose for which He'd become man. Jesus was going to descend the mount, go up to Jerusalem, and die on the cross. It is at the cross where **we** see Christ's glory as He dies for the sins of the world. Still more, He would rise from the dead, thus defeating death forever.

Today our Lord has led us up on a high mountain. Here in this sanctuary we are, for a time, separated from the mundane things of this world. On this mountain He reveals Himself to us and shows us His glory. In so doing, He prepares and strengthens us for life on the plain. While here, we don't see Jesus in all His radiant divine glory. We don't see Moses and Elijah as did Peter, James and John, but we do hear the words of the Law and the Prophets. These words point us to Jesus, the very Son of God, who has come for our salvation. Here, we are in the very presence of Almighty God Himself as He too points us to His Son and tells us to "Hear Him." And so we do. For when we fall to the ground in fear because of our sins, as we must, Jesus touches us and says, "Arise, and do not be afraid." Yes, my friends, Jesus has led us up on a high mountain, and it's good for us to be here.

This is where we enter the presence of the living God who has promised to be present wherever His people have gathered in His Name. This is where we poor, miserable, wretched sinners fall down before Him and confess that we are not worthy to be in the presence of the holy, perfect, righteous, sin-hating God. We cannot bear to hear His unbridled voice, even as the Israelites couldn't bear to hear God's voice on the mountain. Yet we also confess our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God whose birth, life, Transfiguration, death, resurrection, and Ascension were for us men and for our salvation. This is where we hear the announcement of God's complete, total, gracious free forgiveness in Christ proclaimed by a descendant of the prophets and the apostles. This is where we hear the Word of God as we listen to Moses and the prophets and to the apostolic witness that Jesus is the Christ. This is where we hear the Holy Gospel that our Lord was crucified for the sins of all people of all times. We hear that He is risen from the dead and that He lives and reigns to all eternity. In joyful obedience to our heavenly Father, we listen to our Savior call us to follow Him in a life of repentance and faith. We hear Him who came into the world to suffer in our stead and to die in our place. This is where we hear the message of the resurrection that has been proclaimed throughout the centuries. This is where faithful pastors have proclaimed the Law that accuses and condemns, and the Gospel that comforts and consoles, that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). This is where God gathers His people to offer prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and petitions before His throne in the full confidence "that He is our true Father and that we are His true children so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." As the Father tells us to listen to His Son, we hear His Son say, "This is my body, this is my blood" as He breaks bread and takes the cup of wine. Here, kneeling before this holy altar (in spirit if not bodily) and having been touched by Jesus, in, with and under the bread and wine, we hear Him say, "Arise, and do not be afraid." Then upon hearing the good word of the Benediction, with His face shining upon us and His being gracious to us and granting us peace, we are enabled to descend to the plain to take up the tasks of our God-given vocations. That's why it is good for us to be here.

Yet we cannot remain here. Like Jesus and the disciples, we must descend to the plain. We must go down from here and take up the responsibilities of our vocations, whether as husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, teacher, student, worker, or whatever else. We have loved ones to care for and often they have to care for us. There are diseases to live with and burdens to bear. There are jobs to do and responsibilities to meet. Yes, we go down to the trials and tribulations of life. But as we go through those rough times, we remember what we saw on the mountain and that it shows us what lies ahead. We shall one day see Christ's glory in all its brilliance. Until then, we don't have to rely on our faulty memory. We can ascend the mountain of the Lord again and again to hear Him and receive His gifts.

It is good for us to be here. For as we hear once again of our Lord's Transfiguration, we are shown our future. The glory which emanated from Christ's very being will one day be ours as well. For the glory which is His by nature will one day be ours because of our Baptism into Him. We find comfort in Christ's Transfiguration in that we too will be transfigured at the resurrection of all flesh. Because of all that Jesus has done for us and for our salvation, because of His death and resurrection, we have a share in all that is His - His life, His death, His

resurrection, even His glory. St. John writes, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2). St. Paul tells us, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the *glory* which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18).

It is good for us to be here because this is where Jesus shows us that death has no power over us. For when Jesus came down the mountain of Transfiguration, He did so to die. His divine glory was hidden once again and He came down the mountain only to ascend a cross. And as He did, He released death’s stranglehold on us, for He had already declared that He would rise from the dead.

That’s how the Transfiguration of our Lord prepares the way for Lent. We have come through the glory of the Epiphany season during which our Lord is revealed as the only true God. In the Transfiguration, Christ’s glory reminds us that He is the very source of our life and the glory which will one day be ours. As we leave the glory of the Epiphany season behind, we prepare for the Lenten journey where we focus on what Jesus suffered for us and our sins. Today, we sing “Alleluia!” for the last time before it is put away for a while. And all this points us to the celebration of His glorious resurrection, when the Alleluia’s will once again sound forth. Jesus has overcome death, and, united with Him through faith, so shall we. Therefore, by God’s grace alone, we look forward to ascending the final mountain to join Moses and Elijah and all the saints to live in His glorious presence forever and ever. God grant it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener