

"The Transfiguration: Strength over Escape"

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Representatives of the Lord Jesus:

When you pray, for what do you pray – for strength or for escape? I already know the answer. The point of the exercise is to make sure that you come to recognize the answer for yourself. The reality, of course, is that human beings nearly always pray for escape over strength; avoidance of hardship and pain rather than the courage and perseverance to bear up under such things. Nothing necessarily wrong or sinful with that, but it is more than a bit dangerous. How so?

Life is far too evil, far too sinful, far too complex to imagine that avoidance of all hardship and pain is possible, even for Christians. With sin came sickness and disease, and many of those diseases will afflict Christians (including you and me). Sin results in accidents, pain, and suffering – which will also very likely affect us and those we love. Sin brought death, and the clock is therefore ticking for every single human being from the very moment he is conceived.

The point here is not to turn Christians into morbid pessimists, fearful of our own shadows, but to remind each other that forewarned is forearmed. We live in a society that increasingly deludes itself with the notion that science, medicine, insurance – even prayer – can provide some sort of insulation against all that is difficult or painful. The reality is that many things in life are unavoidably difficult – always have been and always will be.

We will seek to address this general topic this morning on the basis of our text, found in the Ninth Chapter of Luke's Gospel – the account of our Lord's Transfiguration:

NKJ **Luke 9:28-36** *About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and*

the two men standing with him. ³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

These are the words of our God – clearly they represent the greatest treasure that we have to share with the world. Though we may lack some or most of the material wealth of this world, we need lack none of the spiritual riches, for they are here for the asking. That our God would richly supply us this morning through the study of these words, so we pray: **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

I can say without reservation that I have never yet met even one Christian who, with the passing of time, would deny the value of the hard times he has suffered. In fact the vast majority would unreservedly testify to the great benefits they have harvested from the most difficult of circumstances. Even the godless philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche recognized as much when he wrote his now-famous: *"That which does not kill us makes us stronger."* It is doubtful that Nietzsche recognized the hand of God in such things (at least not like we do) but even that avowed anti-Christian was able to recognize the benefit of struggle and hardship in the human existence. (Nietzsche, by the way, spent the last 11 years of his life in various asylums for the insane before he died. One wonders if that would have qualified under his "makes us stronger" mantra.)

The fact remains that hard times are not only good but *necessary*. Our text for this morning – the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord – is the ultimate case in point. The Transfiguration marks the beginning of the Lenten season. We rightly recognize it as a special strengthening of our Lord just before the terrible days of Holy Week. There are clearly many lessons for us to learn here from this event, but this morning we focus on just one in particular: the wisdom in seeking strength from our God, rather than just escape from that which is difficult.

Why is this particular philosophy or mindset important? Again, we study our text for answers and trust that our God will richly supply our need.

When Jesus, as true man, considered what lay before him, what was his initial reaction or desire? We hear it in his impassioned prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."** He prayed, in other words, that he might be permitted to escape from the unimaginable misery that awaited him as he carried the weight of the world's sins to the cross. Yet what did he add to the prayer: **"Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done."**

The hard cold reality was that there was no other way to accomplish the rescue of sinful mankind. Had there been any other way, Jesus' loving Father would certainly have granted his prayer – in a heartbeat. In fact had there been any other way, Jesus would never have left heaven in the first place. From this we learn just how desperate our condition was (and is) apart from Jesus Christ. Man could not save himself, nor could any other human being offer a payment for the sins of another. So also Psalm 49 tells us: **"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him -- for the redemption of their souls is costly."** Our one and only chance for forgiveness and eternal life was through the rescue earned by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus.

Here then the basic premise or truth is laid: *Certain good things in life can only come at a cost.* In the case of our salvation, the entire cost was borne by our Lord. The Transfiguration represented a special strengthening for Jesus as he completed his great and necessary work.

How then does mankind fit into this truth? How do we benefit from the understanding that we need to learn to pray for strength rather than just escape?

Note well the rather senseless response of Peter when he saw the spectacular sights described in our text: **"Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** We refer to his words as "senseless" not because his words or desires were necessarily sinful, but because our text tells us: **"He did not know what he was saying."** We read Peter's words as an emotional response to the utter joy that was his at that particular moment.

Have you ever experienced that sort of feeling? Maybe when you were first dating your spouse or when you were enjoying a particularly blissful family outing or some such thing? You find yourself filled with such contentment and joy that you simply don't want to be anywhere else and

you don't want that special time to end. *"I wish we could just stay like this forever."* Peter had apparently found such joy and contentment in the presence of his glorified Lord that he wanted to stay right there, indefinitely. And why not? He was with his friends; he was with his Lord; and in the light of that glorious sight, all was right with the world. Can you really blame him for wanting to stay?

Only he couldn't stay, could he? Why not? First and foremost because Jesus had to be about his Father's business – our salvation. But there was more than that. Every single Christian needs to learn that life on earth is not all about me. It is all about the will of my God and the good of my neighbor. To stay in that place at that time held great appeal for Peter, James, and John – and even, to a certain extent, for Jesus himself – but not for the rest of mankind, including you and me. Jesus had to leave that place and walk the brutal path to the cross. Peter, James, and John had a Church to build.

What awaited these men after they left that place? Jesus, of course, went to be crucified. Peter went on to deny his Lord, wept bitterly, was reinstated by Jesus after his resurrection, was then whipped, beaten, harassed, suffered hunger and hardship of every sort, and eventually was crucified like his Lord. James was hacked to death with a sword at the command of King Herod. John spent many miserable years in exile on the Island of Patmos, was released, and died an old man after decades of contending for the Christian faith against great opposition.

Would it have been better for these men to have remained on the Mount of Transfiguration indefinitely, or even to have died there? From a physical standpoint, almost certainly. Would that have been best for you and me and the rest of the Christian Church? Certainly not. How much poorer we would all be without the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Peter, and the Revelation. How much poorer the Church without the foundation these men helped to lay and the instruction and witness they provided for countless souls during their time of grace on earth. Did such things come easily or without personal cost and sacrifice? Obviously not. Would Peter, James, and John have opted for the easier road had they been given the option? Of course, but the point here is that such things are not always possible. So also Paul and Barnabas warned the Christians in Asia Minor: **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."** (Acts 14:22)

Now carry these things forward into your own life and let them instruct and strengthen you. Rare to non-existent is the Christian who prays for hard times to come into his life and into the lives of his loved ones. We pray for avoidance – a hedge of protection erected by our God. Nothing wrong with that, in and of itself. We noted earlier that Jesus did the same. Yet what we also want to note this morning is that the answer to Jesus' prayer was no. There was simply no avoiding the hard things that faced Jesus. There may well be no avoiding the hard things that face us – not if we are to survive this filthy, perverse world and join our Lord and all the saints in paradise. Not if we are to carry out our Lord's Great Commission to **"make disciples of all nations."**

Forewarned is not only forearmed here, knowing these facts in advance is intended by our God to steel our resolve for the work that lies ahead and the good things that will result for all of God's children. No one reading these words relishes the thought of suffering of any kind, yet we have here been given not only a view of those who have gone before, but a vision of the certain end of those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

As Peter, James, and John dutifully followed their Lord down off of that glorious mountain, so we too have been commissioned to brave the worst that a sinful world has to offer in our struggle to share the Word of Life. Exactly what form that hardship will take in your individual existence no one can predict. Standing for the truth may alienate you from the members of your own family. It may cause your exclusion from the circle of those who you thought were your friends. Standing for the truth of God's Word may one day place you at odds with your government. Or your trials may take a different path. Perhaps God will allow physical, mental, or emotional suffering in your life so that you might reach out and help others, bringing them the message of the gospel. God may find the need to remove your wealth so that you learn not to set your heart on that which will not survive the fires of Judgment Day. God alone knows what the future holds for any of us.

Sin ruined all. The entrance of sin into God's perfect creation necessitated many painful lessons. Know through them all that the love of our God does not fail – no more than it failed when he allowed his own dear Son to suffer for that which he did not cause. Know also that **"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you can bear."** (1 Corinthians 10:13) This is our hope; this is our confidence. In recognizing such truths we prepare not only to enter the season of Lent, but for the rest of our lives in humble service to the Living God. Thy will, O God, be

done – also in us. If hard times are necessary, we ask only the strength to bear up under whatever you in your wisdom allow. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 3:1-6** Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ² who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. ³ For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God. ⁵ And Moses indeed *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, ⁶ but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

Miss Suzannah Miller, Organist

Transfiguration Sunday – February 14, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#135- (Red Hymnal)

"'Tis Good Lord to Be Here"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 15.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 34:1-8) We note several facts from our first lesson. First, that even the great Moses was held accountable for his rebellious acts – being denied entrance into the Promised Land for disobeying one of the Lord's commands. Yet we also note the honor that God bestowed on Moses in that he is the only man recorded to have been buried by God himself. We also note that it is fitting to speak of Moses in connection with the Transfiguration, in which he later took part.

The Epistle Lesson: (Hebrews 3:1-6) As great as Moses was, he could not begin to compare to the One who would come later – Jesus Christ. We also note that the law given through Moses prepared the way for Jesus by showing our profound need for a Savior. Jesus kept that law for us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Red Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#719- (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus on the Mountain Peak"

The Sermon - Text: : Luke 9:28-36 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Transfiguration: Strength over Escape"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Red Hymnal page 22

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#311- (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ Our Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24)

The Distribution -#315- (Red Hymnal)

"I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table"

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 29)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#341- (Verses 1, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (49) 2010 Average (49)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-4:30 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Ash Wednesday Service
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC – Pastor David Fuerstenau has returned the call to Fairchild, WI. Pastor Eric Libby is considering the calls to Sleepy Eye and New Ulm, MN.

Lent – Lent begins this week with our Ash Wednesday Service at 7:00 p.m., and continues with midweek services leading up to Holy Week. We pray for a heart like David's, who said, **"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the House of the Lord!'"**

Confirmation Time Changes – Confirmation students and parents note the time changes for during the Lenten season. On those days when the Pastor travels to Jamestown, class is at 4:30 – as is the case this week.

ILC Announcement - ILC is soliciting nominations to serve as Supervisor of the Women's Dormitory on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College. A list of qualifications and compensation is available from the Pastor.

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The hard cold reality was that there was no other way to accomplish the rescue of sinful mankind. Had there been any other way, Jesus' loving Father would certainly have granted his prayer – in a heartbeat. In fact had there been any other way, Jesus would never have left heaven in the first place. From this we learn just how desperate our condition was (and is) apart from Jesus Christ. Man could not save himself, nor could any other human being offer a payment for the sins of another. So also Psalm 49 tells us: **"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him -- for the redemption of their souls is costly."** Our one and only chance for forgiveness and eternal life was through the rescue earned by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus.

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The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 15.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 34:1-8) We note several facts from our first lesson. First, that even the great Moses was held accountable for his rebellious acts – being denied entrance into the Promised Land for disobeying one of the Lord's commands. Yet we also note the honor that God bestowed on Moses in that he is the only man recorded to have been buried by God himself. We also note that it is fitting to speak of Moses in connection with the Transfiguration, in which he later took part.

The Epistle Lesson: (Hebrews 3:1-6) As great as Moses was, he could not begin to compare to the One who would come later – Jesus Christ. We also note that the law given through Moses prepared the way for Jesus by showing our profound need for a Savior. Jesus kept that law for us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Red Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#719- (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus on the Mountain Peak"

The Sermon - Text: : Luke 9:28-36 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Transfiguration: Strength over Escape"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Red Hymnal page 22

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#311- (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ Our Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24)

The Distribution -#315- (Red Hymnal)

"I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table"

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 29)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#341- (Verses 1, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (49) 2010 Average (49)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-4:30 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Ash Wednesday Service
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC – Pastor David Fuerstenau has returned the call to Fairchild, WI. Pastor Eric Libby is considering the calls to Sleepy Eye and New Ulm, MN.

Lent – Lent begins this week with our Ash Wednesday Service at 7:00 p.m., and continues with midweek services leading up to Holy Week. We pray for a heart like David's, who said, **"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the House of the Lord!'"**

Confirmation Time Changes – Confirmation students and parents note the time changes for during the Lenten season. On those days when the Pastor travels to Jamestown, class is at 4:30 – as is the case this week.

ILC Announcement - ILC is soliciting nominations to serve as Supervisor of the Women's Dormitory on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College. A list of qualifications and compensation is available from the Pastor.