

"The Transfiguration, His and Ours"

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

May you be given the faith and the wisdom to recognize both the power and the love of God our Father, of his Holy Spirit, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The text for our consideration this morning reveals to us the event we celebrate on this day, the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. That great event – our text – is found recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, the Seventeenth Chapter:

ESV **Matthew 17:1-9** *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, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ ¶ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."*

So far the very words of God. Concerning this very Word of God the Apostle Peter said that we would **"do well to pay attention as a to light shining in a dark place."** We therefore focus our attention on these verbally inspired words from our God as we also pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

First a question. What did you get out of the reading of the text for this morning? Anything at all, or did you hear or read it with just sort of a numb sense of comfortable religiosity? This is admittedly something of an abrupt question, but sometimes it takes that to wake us from our spiritual lethargy.

The sad fact is we need to engage in a relentless struggle to avoid becoming lazy and complacent in our faith life.

When sinful human beings encounter the vast panorama of God's Word they actually see very little of what is really there. Even those who trip lightly across the surface routinely come to imagine that what they have witnessed is really of very little practical value. Oh the writing is pretty good (in their humble estimation) and there are contained therein some solid little bits of moralizing, but all in all the Bible is to them an over-hyped piece of real estate.

The real problem is that man has no idea what untold wealth lies just below the surface of God's Holy Word. What is more, all men from birth lack both the vision to recognize the potential and the tools to extract all of those divine riches. The result is a pure and catastrophic waste on a scale unimagined by humankind. How can anyone put a price tag on that which rescues us from an eternity in hell and carries us instead to an unimaginably blissful paradise that never ends? How can anyone accurately evaluate that which not only saves us, but which is designed also to comfort, encourage, and protect us? The unparalleled wealth given to us by our gracious and merciful God will forever remain hidden from the unbelieving world, unless and until they are taught to extract it.

We share much with the unbelieving world, don't we? We too miss out on so much of what our Lord would lavish upon us simply because we are lazy. We skim past, flip through, pass over great riches that are just lying there, waiting for us to pick them up and make them our own. Digging out the answers to these sorts of questions is what makes the Scriptures come alive, and it is how we learn, grow, and are strengthened for the work and the battles that lie ahead.

All of which sounds good, but what does it really mean? In connection with this morning's text, it means that we are supposed to listen and read with the understanding that God's Word always represents a treasure that is to be mined. To do so, we sometimes need to tear it apart and reassemble it. In more practical terms, it means that we should, upon hearing the words of this particular text, ask (and then answer) questions like, *"What does it mean to be transfigured? What does it mean that Jesus was transfigured? Why was Jesus transfigured? What were Moses and Elijah doing there, and why did Jesus first invite Peter, James, and John to witness these sublime sights, and then tell them (at least for the time being) to keep the event to themselves?"*

To be transfigured means, literally, to be changed, usually on the outside and usually for the better – but that bit of information really doesn't help us much. We already pretty much figured that out from a simple reading of the text. That which was witnessed here in Jesus was infinitely more than just a brief, outward glowing. In fact the Greek word here describing what took place in Jesus was carried nearly intact into the English as *metamorphosis*. What those three privileged apostles were fortunate enough to witness was a glimpse of Jesus with his divine glory shining through. They were seeing the majesty that Jesus always possessed, but now it was attached to and permeated the human body that he had taken on.

The vision absolutely transfixed Peter, James, and John, it was that sublime. We miss a key component of this text – indeed this entire *event* – if we fail to pause for a bit to take this in. The magnificence that these men here witnessed defied description, but our inspired text did what it could, given the bounds of human communication: **"His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light."** Hold that thought, that image, for just a bit because we are going to come back to it.

Why was Jesus transfigured? Both for Jesus and for you and me. When we hear that it is Transfiguration Sunday, we immediately ought to recognize that we once again stand at the door of Lent. The event provided Jesus with a special strengthening just before he undertook the final leg of his great and incomparable journey of humiliation and self-sacrifice. That journey carried him from the womb of Mary to the cross of Calvary. The Transfiguration undoubtedly therefore served as a great spiritual boost before Jesus had to suffer the terrors of Good Friday – before he had to bear the punishment for the sum total of every sin ever committed by mankind.

What then are we supposed to learn from the fact that it was Moses and Elijah who spoke to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Moses was the giver of the Law; Elijah was arguably the greatest of the prophets. In Moses and Elijah then we have a representation of **"the Law and the Prophets,"** referred to on more than one occasion by Jesus himself. So also we read in Luke 16:16, **"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it."** Paul also picked up the expression, since we read in Romans 3:21, **"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."**

The day of Moses and Elijah, those who symbolized **"the law and the Prophets,"** was rapidly coming to a close. A new order, a new covenant,

was being established. The Old was passing off to the New. In this we recognize that the Law and the Prophets have given way to Jesus Christ. What does that mean, personally, to you and me? It means that the Old Covenant, with all of its demands and condemnations, has given way to the New Covenant. This New Covenant says simply: Your sins are forgiven. Jesus has paid for them. Salvation is yours, you are reconciled to God. Gone – every single one of your sins.

Again, don't hold these promises from our God at arm's length. Draw them into your heart and make them both real and personal. Don't just hear that your sins are forgiven in general terms. Think of a sin that you committed this past week. That very sin is included in what we are talking about here. That sin has been forgiven. Think now of a very big and very black sin from your past – a sin that still makes you blush to think that you were capable of such lawlessness or perversion. That, too, is the sin that has been forgiven.

Why did Jesus invite Peter, James, and John to witness this event? As later witnesses, to be sure, but the Apostles, who spent about three years at the Savior's side, had to face a problem unique to their situation. Because of their physical, day to day contact with the man Jesus, it must have been difficult for them to recognize, moment by moment, that Jesus was both true man *and true God*. How difficult it must have been for them to remember, having seen Jesus eat, sleep, laugh, cry, and all the rest - how difficult to remember that in *man* **"dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."** But not after this – not after they witnessed the Transfiguration. Jesus could well have invited Peter, James, and John to witness his Transfiguration as a remedy for this very problem. Never again would these three men forget that Jesus was more than just true man. Through their witness we today can never forget that the man Jesus, who was nailed to the cross, was also *"very God of very God, begotten, not made. Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."* (Words from the Nicene Creed) What a fitting reminder, as we enter the season of Lent, that it was *God himself* who offered his life for man.

The next very personal application of this section of God's Word is the fact that this very Son of God is the one who died for *my* sins and even today serves as *my* intercessor at the Father's right hand. The Bible tells us that **"if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** (1 John 2:1) While on earth, Jesus set aside the glory that was his, along with the full use of his power. Here we are given a brief glimpse of the power and majesty that are his. Through the eyes of Peter, James and John we see Jesus *as he is now*. Jesus himself told us, after his resurrection, **"All power is given**

unto me in heaven and on earth..." The great news for you and me in all of this is that this is the same Jesus who intercedes for you and me right at this very moment. Can not such a God do for us whatever is best for us? Wouldn't it be wise to remember this picture of Jesus' shining in power and glory when we are tried and tested here in time? Next time a problem confronts you – a regular Gordian Knot whopper of a problem – look not to the Jesus lying helpless in the manger, nor even to the cadaverous looking Jesus dragging his own cross through the streets of Jerusalem. Look to the Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and there recognize the power he now wields – the power he has promised to use in your behalf. Shall not such a God be able to accomplish for you whatever is best for your soul?

When Peter, James, and John had seen and experienced the great glory of the Savior on that Transfiguration Hill, they wanted to stay right there – the sight was that spectacular. Peter offered to build homes for everyone right there on the spot. Jesus would have none of it - not from Peter and certainly not from us. Souls are being strengthened here in this church building, but souls are dying out there, and each one of us has the medicine, the unique remedy, they need to escape an eternity in hell. Our Lord Jesus wants us to expend the same effort at reaching others that we would want others to expend in bringing us the Words of life. Transfiguration tells us, *"You've met with the Lord, now go and tell your neighbor what you've seen."*

Our God knows full well that the job he gave us to do would not be easy, so he left us with something to lighten our step as we walk the long path toward home. You will recall that you were supposed to hold that vision of Jesus in your mind's eye, and that we would return to it later. We return to that thought now, and here is the reason, given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Philippians (3:20-21): ***"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*** Do you recall that splendid vision of Jesus as he was transfigured? Because of what that same Jesus has done for you and me, one day soon that gloried body will be ours. God's Word promises that our bodies will also be transfigured. What an incredible promise. Absolutely beyond imagination – yet altogether true, for our Savior-God has promised.

Thanks and praise be to God, who gives such great gifts, and such great promises, to men. Let this be a part of the joy that gladdens your heart on the long journey home. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 24:12-18** The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." ¹³ So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴ And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them." ¹⁵ ¶ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

^{ESV} **2 Peter 1:16-21** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

Transfiguration Sunday – February 26, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 135 (Red Hymnal)

"Tis Good Lord to Be Here"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 24:12, 15-18) We have not been privileged to see even the veiled glory of our God, yet others have. Moses saw a shadow of that glory when he received the Ten Commandments. Permit his testimony to be enough for us as we thrill to the fact that we *will* one day behold that glory, and will exist in the presence of that glory for all eternity.

The Epistle Lesson: (2 Peter 1:16-21) Peter and the other Apostles did not use "*cleverly devised fables*" in teaching the early Church about Jesus. They simply gave their eyewitness accounts. Note well Peter's suggestion to us. We did not see the Transfigured Jesus with our own eyes, but we do have something better - His Word. Peter's advice: "*Pay attention to that Word as to a light shining in a dark place.*"

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 719 (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus on the Mountain Peak"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 17:1-9 (Printed on the back page)

"The Transfiguration – His and Ours"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Stanzas 1 & 8) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 651 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Be Still My Soul"

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 - Sunday (44) Ave (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Wednesday	-TBT	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Ash Wednesday Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Paul Nolting has accepted the calls to the Tri-parish of Valentine, Mission, and White River. Immanuel of Winter Haven has called Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer. Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit. Pastor David Reim is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Heidi Radtke has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. She is considering the call to St. Stephen of San Francisco.

Lenten Schedule – This week we begin the season of Lent with our Ash Wednesday service at 7pm. Confirmation parents please speak to the Pastor so that we can schedule Confirmation classes during this season.

Church Choir – Anyone interested in singing in the Church Choir please speak to Eileen. The choir will practice on Sundays after/during the fellowship time.

CLC Women's Retreat – This year's theme is "Thy Will Be Done" and is based on Proverbs 3:5-6. It is scheduled April 21-23 in Winona, MN. See the poster on the entry table for further details. Please also be aware that at least one vehicle will be driving to the event from Bismarck. Anyone who would like to attend and is looking for a ride, please contact Carolyn Johnson or Sandy Roehl.