

"Avoid Confront Embrace"

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:

I'm guessing you all know what "avoidance" is. Even if you cannot define it, you've all experienced it – firsthand or in others. Psychologists also refer to it as "avoidant coping" (among other things) and define it as *the tendency to order or change thoughts or actions to avoid an uncomfortable, stressful, or traumatic situation*. Those who suffer from PTSD, for example, routinely suppress all thoughts and memories of the traumatic events that affected them so profoundly. Those, however, are actually extreme examples of what most of us routinely do or experience, to one extent or another, on an almost daily basis.

While I don't know anyone who actually enjoys dwelling on the difficult events of the past, we need to distinguish between the various forms or examples of avoidance. Some are relatively harmless; others are anything but. One of the more common form of avoidance is when someone refuses even to look at the person with whom they are angry, upset, or frustrated. Again, you've probably all experienced situations where, for whatever reason, someone can't even bring themselves to look at you. Often this is a demonstration of loathing, but it can also be a result of guilt or shame. Body language usually tells you which it is. Those who have an inordinate fear of confrontation often go to great lengths to avoid any and all contact they fear might result in confrontation or discord.

The problem with all of this is that while some forms of avoidance are no big deal, others are sinful, even debilitating or crippling, and some are actually good and necessary. The challenge is determining which is which. 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:

ESV Luke 9:28-36 Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to

accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

This is God's Word. It therefore represents one of the greatest treasures that we have been given by our God. Recognizing what we have been given, we ask that our God would richly bless us this morning through the study of these words with this simple prayer: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Given the universal truth that God uses hard things in life to test and strengthen us, it should be self-evident that avoidance of all that is difficult or unpleasant is not the answer. Clearly God tells us to practice avoidance when it comes to all forms of evil. He told us, for example, to avoid: all who teach falsely (Romans 16:17), irreverent babble (1 Timothy 6:7), divisive or contentious people (Titus 3:10), the ways of the wicked (Proverbs 4:15), and foolish controversies about history and the law (Titus 3:9). Obviously then not all forms of "avoidance" are bad.

Many hard things in life are, in fact, not only good but *necessary*. Because of our natural stubbornness, many of the lessons we need to learn are only realized through hardship. Because of our pride and self-centeredness, relationship problems don't go away when we simply refuse to confront them. Growth is almost never the result of doing or experiencing nothing. 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 one in particular: the wisdom in seeking strength from our God, rather than just avoidance or escape from that which is difficult.

When Jesus, as true man, considered what lay before him, we learn his initial reaction or desire from 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 *avoid* the unimaginable torment and abandonment that awaited him as he carried the weight of the world's sins to the cross. Yet he also added: **"Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done."**

The bitter 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 not just about God's love for us, but 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. 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, redemption, and eternal life was through the rescue earned by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ.

Here then the basic premise or truth is laid: *Certain things in life only come at a cost, and that cost is absolutely and unequivocally unavoidable.* In the case of our salvation, the entire cost was borne by our Savior. The Transfiguration represented a special strengthening for Jesus as he carried to completion his great and necessary work.

How then does mankind fit into this truth? How do we benefit from the understanding that not all hardships can or even should be avoided? Our text gives us further insight.

Note the rather senseless response of Peter when he saw the spectacular sights described in our text: **"Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents-- one for you, and 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. Who can blame him for wanting to stay?

Only he couldn't stay, could he? Why not? First and foremost because Jesus couldn't stay. He 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. Mark Twain is credited with saying: *"The two best days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."* We were born to serve God and our 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 message to share and 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, certainly. Would that have been best for you and me and the rest of the Christian Church? Clearly 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 very 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. I know of no one who prays for hard times to come into their own life or 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 broken, perverse world and join our Lord and all the saints in heaven. 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 be our own personal "transfiguration" of sorts – strengthening us and steeling our resolve for the work that lies ahead and the good things that will result for all of God's children. No one hearing or reading these words relishes the thought of suffering, yet we have here been given not only the example of those who have gone before, but a vision of the certain end of those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Yet also in this we want more than just survival, for there is a place beyond simple survival. We want more than just the strength to confront all unavoidable hardships, so we also ask our God for the grace and wisdom to *embrace* whatever he in his wisdom allows. We want the wisdom and maturity to welcome whatever he allows. While first disparaging his deficiencies, Paul eventually learned to boast about those very weaknesses, understanding that God is magnified through human weakness. He learned to embrace hardship because of what it produced in him, and through him for others. He learned the progression of hardship into perseverance, and then character, and finally into a living and abiding hope. (Romans 5:1-5) You and I can also learn to *embrace* hardship when we finally learn to recognize and trust God's wisdom and love, also in that which seems so difficult and disagreeable.

This is our hope; this is our goal. In recognizing such truths we prepare not only to enter the season of Lent, but for the rest of our lives as humble servants 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 and the wisdom to embrace your goodness in every form. All because we know one thing more: that for all who die in the Christian faith, eternal life with our Lord is also absolutely unavoidable. Amen.*

ESV **Deuteronomy 34:1-12** Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ And the LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." ⁵ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, ⁶ and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. ⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. ⁸ And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. ⁹ ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

ESV **Hebrews 3:1-6** Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses--as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

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Transfiguration Sunday – February 27, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 135 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Tis Good Lord to Be Here"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

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

The First Lesson (Deuteronomy 34:1-12) Our first reading is the account of the death of Moses. Moses died on Mount Nebo, in sight of the Promised Land, and was buried by God himself. This has application to our sermon this morning in that Moses was one of the two – along with the Prophet Elijah – that spoke to Jesus at his Transformation. We are told they spoke to Jesus about his impending death. One day it would be most interesting to hear what they told him.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30)

The Second Lesson: (Hebrews 3:1-6) Our New Testament lesson "puts Moses in his place." Not that *Moses* needed to be reprimanded, but mankind needed to better understand how his work and calling relates to Jesus' work and calling. Through Moses came the Law. Man could not - would not - keep that law. We therefore needed someone to keep the law in our place. This is what Jesus came to do. This is what Jesus *has now done for us*.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 719 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Jesus on the Mountain Peak"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 9:28-36 (*Printed on the back of this bulletin*)
"Avoid, Confront, Embrace"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 341 (*Stanzas 1-4*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 341 (*Stanza 5*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (23) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Ash Wednesday Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Meyer baby shower

CLC News – Pastor Aaron Ude is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Teacher Michaela Winters is considering the call to Berea Lutheran School of Inver Grove Heights. Mrs. Dawn Mayhew is considering the call to Redeemer School of Cheyenne. Prof. Joel Gullerud is considering the call to Faith School of Markesan.

Baby Shower – A baby shower for Timothy and Hope Meyer is scheduled for next Sunday, March 6, during the fellowship hour.

March Communion Services – We return to our regular communion schedule this month, with the Lord's Supper offered, God-willing, on the 2nd and 4th Sundays.

Lent – This week we enter the season of Lent, beginning with our Ash Wednesday service at 7pm. Confirmation start time is 5:45pm.

Council Meeting Notes – Four Council members, plus the Pastor, attended the meeting on February 20th. Treasurer Mantz reported that January offerings exceeded budgeted needs by \$66, but the General Fund remains in deficit by \$700. All Special Assessments were paid in advance from our Reserve Roofing Fund to save interest charges. A revised budget will be presented to the Voters in May that will reflect the changes. The Council acknowledged the need to replace our current vacuum cleaners. Electronic donations will soon be made available on our website. At our request, one of the security lights on the Police Training Center has been changed to something less invasive to our property. Next meeting: March 13th.