

Matthew 17:1-9
“A Glimpse of What is to Come”
The Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 19, 2023
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them”
(Matthew 17:1-2a).

In just mere minutes, Peter, James, and John saw a glimpse of what is to come. So, what did they see? What did they hear? What did this experience mean for Jesus, for the disciples, and for us?

First, let’s go back six days before this mountaintop experience. Six days earlier, Jesus was with His disciples as they came into the district of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked His disciples, ***“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*** (Matthew 16:13) The disciples then responded with what they heard from the crowds about Jesus, saying: ***“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”*** (Matthew 16:14).

Jesus then asks them, ***“But who do you say that I am?”*** (Matthew 16:15) Peter immediately answered, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*** (Matthew 16:16).

But that day did not end with Peter’s confession. That day continued, as Jesus talks about His going to Jerusalem. He talks about His upcoming suffering and death. He says that after three days, He would rise again. But Peter, who just confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the very Messiah, could not fathom His Lord dying. Peter spoke up rebuking Jesus saying: ***“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you”*** (Matthew 16:22). What Peter is saying is this: ***“I will never let you die!”***

Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, ***“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man”*** (Matthew 16:23).

Jesus continued saying that if anyone would follow Him, they must deny themselves, they must take up a cross and always be ready to lose their life. Here, Jesus is preparing His disciples for what is to come.

Fast forward to today's lesson, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. Now, many crucial things in God's saving plan have taken place on mountains. This mountaintop experience would be no different.

Suddenly, Jesus' appearance transformed before their eyes. Jesus became dazzling bright and radiant. His face was radiating like the sun. His clothing became intensely white as white as pure light as no one on earth could bleach them. Now, there was no spotlight beaming onto Him; this was pure light coming from Him. Jesus was the source of this light. Jesus' human appearance was being overpowered by His divine glory.

As Peter, James, and John were astounded by the light radiating from Jesus, there appeared in front of them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Now, Moses and Elijah were also known for their own mountaintop experiences. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments upon Mount Sinai. God spoke to Elijah upon Mount Horeb. But this mountaintop experience was like no other.

As there was confusion on who Jesus was six days earlier. Upon this mountain, there was no confusion. At this moment, Moses and Elijah – *who represent the Law and the Prophets* – are bearing witness that Jesus is the Savior of the world, who has come to suffer, die, and rise to restore humanity to God the Father.

As the disciples are overhearing this conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, Peter, not knowing what to say and being a man of action cries out, ***“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”*** (Matthew 17:4).

Sometimes, we are like Peter. We like the glory of God, the power of God, the strength of God. We like the shining Jesus. But what we need is the bleeding Jesus to be saved. Suffering must come first, and then glory. If we had it our way, we would like to skip suffering and death, altogether. But we need the forgiveness of sins before we are ready to live in God's glory.

The way we receive forgiveness is only through the suffering and death of Jesus. He would come down from that mountain and once again hide His glorious appearance. He would walk through the valley of the shadow of death for all people. He would be falsely tried and unjustly convicted. He would carry His own cross to Golgotha. He would feel the heavy nails piercing His wrists and ankles. He would experience the lifting of the cross into its place in the stone. He would die.

Knowing all that was ahead of Him, Jesus gives a glimpse of His glory. Jesus revealed His glory for His disciples and for us. But why did Jesus do this? Why did Jesus manifest His glory?

First, Jesus knew His time on earth was coming to a close and He knew His departure would cause fear and doubt in the minds of His disciples. Although, Christ's disciples have seen many miracles and signs, they still had faith that needed strengthening, just as we do.

We, like the disciples, tend to worry about tomorrow. We can get ourselves caught up in being world-weary. "Will I have enough money to pay my bills?" After watching any news cast, many of us ask, "Where do we go from here?" "Will things ever get better?"

Like us, the disciples were world-weary. Like us, they needed hope. This is why Jesus displayed His real glory on the mountaintop. You see, Jesus knew that His upcoming suffering and death may cause His disciples to lose heart. This is why He displayed His divine glory to give them hope and to remind them that He is in fact still in control. Despite being nailed to the cross, Jesus is still in control. All we have to do is trust in Him.

So, even in what seems like the worst of times, God is there to turn that bad into good. Through His Transfiguration, He is teaching His disciples that it is only through His suffering and death that He will show His true glory.

A second thing to note here is that Jesus gave His disciples and us a glimpse of heaven. You see, a little glimpse of heaven was displayed upon that mountaintop.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus never introduced Moses and Elijah to Peter, James, and John. And there were not any quality pictures of Moses and Elijah. Yet, these three disciples instinctively knew they were in the presence of Moses and Elijah. How would they recognize them?

Many of us may wonder if we would, in fact, recognize our loved ones in heaven.

This moment at the Transfiguration proves that we will recognize our loved ones in heaven. This includes even those we have never seen with our own eyes. For anyone who has experienced the death of a child, or you never met a grandparent, you will recognize everyone you see in heaven. This is how Peter, James, and John recognized Moses and Elijah as this glimpse of heaven on earth was revealed to them. You see, when we are in heaven, we will recognize everyone, those we knew in our earthly life and those we never met.

But despite receiving this glimpse of heaven, the disciples are soon frightened as they hear the voice from heaven proclaim: ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”*** (Matthew 17:5). These words caused the disciples to fall on their faces terrified. Peter and the other disciples had their idea on how everything should be, but the voice says: ***“Listen to Jesus!”*** The Transfiguration was a wonderful moment – but this moment of divine glory would have to end, because Jesus must suffer, He must die, and He must be resurrected on the third day.

Jesus says to His terrified disciples: ***“Rise, and have no fear”*** (Matthew 17:7). Jesus touches them and commands them to stand and not be afraid. In a moment, all the glory is gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. The cloud is gone. The brightness shining from the face of Jesus is gone. And this is for their comfort. It is only Jesus in His humility that saves us and comforts us. Today, on this Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday, Christ prepares us for what is to come. He alone gives us the sure and certain hope in all circumstances.

As we soon will begin the season of Lent, Jesus will leave the Mount of Transfiguration and turn His face to Mount Calvary. Even through the darkness of Mount Calvary, His light shines through that darkness and bursts forth on Easter.

Even today, we continue to receive a glimpse of Christ’s glory as He continues to transform us through His Word and Sacrament. Through His Word, we hear His life-giving voice as He leads us in His Law and Gospel. Through His Sacrament, Jesus comes to us transformed in the form of bread and wine to forgive our sins and strengthen our weak faith.

In this blessed moment upon the Mount of Transfiguration, we receive a glimpse of the blessings to come that are ours by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +