

Joshua Willadsen
Transfiguration Sunday
Sermons
March 6, 2011

MATTHEW 17:1-9 - "JESUS, GLORY OF YAHWEH"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! You and I have not seen the face of Jesus shining in glory. You and I have not gazed upon the brilliance of His divine majesty. Jesus' glory is hidden from our eyes as is His face. But one day we shall look upon the face of Jesus and behold His glory, bright shining as the sun. In the resurrection, when Jesus shall return to raise us from the dead and to give us new and glorified bodies, then we shall see Jesus face to face in His glory and we shall find comfort and peace, and be filled with wonder, joy, thanksgiving, and awe.

Until that day, we walk not by sight, but by faith in Jesus' Word. We hear and listen to the words He has spoken to us. We cling by faith to His promises proclaimed in the Gospel and gladly hear and listen to Jesus' teaching, which is written down for us by those who have seen His glory face to face and is taught by those whom Jesus has authorized to preach and teach.

Throughout the season of Epiphany, Jesus of Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, has been revealed to us as Emmanuel, God with us in the flesh, sent to save His people from their sins. We have heard Matthew's witness of the Baptism of the Lord and went "back to the future" to when Jesus who needed no conversion from unbelief to faith stood with sinners and for sinners and was subsequently anointed by the Holy Spirit as a dove and declared from heaven to be the Father's beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased. We heard how Jesus called sinful and ordinary fishermen through His powerful Word to be His disciples, forgiven and new. We listened to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and heard Him teaching us to be salt and light, to be perfect as the Father is perfect, and to seek out that which we truly need, the reign of God and His righteousness present in Jesus. Throughout Epiphany we have celebrated that the man Jesus is at the same time God, who made the heavens and the earth, sent by the Father to undo the evil of sin.

Today at the end of the Epiphany season on what is Transfiguration Sunday as we prepare to follow our Lord to the cross in the Season of Lent, we get a glimpse of the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as seen by Peter, James, and John. Transfiguration Sunday celebrates that day when Jesus revealed to Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah His divine glory as the Son of God and thereby prepared them for His coming suffering, death, and resurrection and their own journey to the cross. The celebration of Jesus' transfiguration is meant to proclaim Jesus' identity as true God and true man and to encourage us as we daily take up our crosses and follow Jesus to His cross.

Matthew tells us that the event of Jesus' transfiguration took place just after He first revealed to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised (Matthew 16:21). Peter and the other disciples did not receive these words of Jesus well. Peter took the Lord aside and rebuked Him, declaring that such things would never happen to the Lord. It was not in the mind of Peter and the other disciples that Jesus, being the Christ of God, would ever suffer and die; in their mind Jesus was to continue to have a glorious ministry, to be welcomed with glorious acclaim by all the people and leaders in Jerusalem, to be proclaimed publicly as the Christ and King of the Jews, and to extend the reign of God from Jerusalem outward to the ends of the earth. Suffering and death were unthinkable! To the mind of man, yes this was unthinkable, but not to God. Jesus replied to Peter and the rest of the disciples very strongly saying, *"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). Immediately afterward Jesus then told His disciple that they must pick up their cross and follow after Him. Then right after this the event of Jesus' transfiguration took place on the mountain with Peter, James, and John.

1 And after six days Jesus took Peter and James and John his brother and He brought them up onto a high mountain privately. 2 And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. 3 And behold Moses and Elijah appeared to them speaking together with Him. 4 And Peter replied and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make here three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 Yet while he was speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him." 6 And after the disciples heard this they fell down upon their faces and they were very afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them and said, "Rise and do not be afraid." 8 And after they lifted their eyes they saw no one except Jesus only. 9 And as they descended from the mountain Jesus commanded them say, "Speak to no one what was seen until when the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

What a change! In more ways than one: from talk of suffering and death to brilliant revelation of Jesus' glory; from seeing the Lord as the disciples always had to suddenly seeing His face shine as the sun and His clothing bright as light! Jesus was still Jesus, but no longer was His divine glory hidden, but revealed so that they could see it. And then Moses and Elijah were there speaking with Jesus; the two great prophets of old whom Peter, James, and John had never seen, but knew from the words of Scripture. What wonder, what glory indeed!

James and John said nothing, but Peter couldn't keep silent. In the midst of such glory, Peter had words to speak, words that started speaking the truth, "Lord it is good for us to be here," but then quickly turned into ramblings of one who yet again missed the significance of the events happening right before his eyes. Peter starts talking about setting up tents to honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah as if they were all equally prophets of God. But Peter's ramblings are suddenly interrupted by a bright cloud and the voice of God the Father from heaven who revealed the true significance of the moment: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him."

Immediately Peter, James, and John were all silent face down on the ground in fear! God the Father's voice had spoken declaring Jesus to be His Son, declaring

Jesus to be God in the flesh. Furthermore the Father's voice directed Peter, James, and John to listen to Jesus; this was not a mere general listen to Jesus, but specifically hear the words of Jesus concerning His coming suffering, death, and resurrection, the very words they didn't understand nor wanted to hear. Peter, James, and John were afraid, face down before God in His glory and there they lay as if dead.

But then Jesus came to them, then Jesus touched them, and then Jesus said to them "Rise and do not be afraid." What love and compassion the Lord had for His disciples! Jesus drew near to them while they were frozen with fear, as if dead, and He rose them up and assured them by touch and Word that all was good and well. When the disciples finally looked up, only Jesus was there, Jesus their Lord and Master, Jesus their God come in the flesh.

Peter, James, and John had witnessed things that day that no one else beside Moses and Elijah had seen; only they saw the glory of God in Jesus; only they were overshadowed by the bright cloud; and only they heard the Father's voice declare Jesus to be His beloved Son. Peter, James, and John witnessed ahead of time what more were able to witness after the resurrection and what we shall witness at the end when Christ Jesus returns in His full glory to raise the dead. Jesus revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John to prepare them for the cross to come. Jesus revealed His glory so that they might bear witness to His glory after His suffering, death, and resurrection. The events of the transfiguration, the revealing of Jesus' glory and full identity, were to remain a secret until Jesus had fulfilled all that the Father had sent Him to do. Jesus had yet to give His life as the ransom for the many; Jesus had yet to die on the cross.

But now Jesus has suffered, died, and risen from the dead! Jesus has fulfilled all the Father sent Him to do. The ransom has been paid by the body and blood of Christ. Jesus died to set humanity free from sin. Jesus rose in glory that we too might be raised up from death to new and everlasting life. Jesus' work stands completed. All that remains is for Jesus to return in His glory and raise us from the dead, then we too shall see Jesus face to face.

But we are not yet at that day. We are still waiting for that day when Jesus will return in His glory to raise us in glory. Now we must wait without seeing. Now we must wait apart from glory in the shadow of the cross of Christ. This waiting without seeing is not easy for us. Waiting is never easy, especially when we are waiting for people and events beloved and long hoped for. We get tired of waiting. We often get distracted by things in the present and loose sight of that which we are waiting for. And our waiting is filled with suffering, fear, and death.

I just returned from my Grandmother's funeral; she died on Tuesday. My Grandmother had been waiting to see Jesus for some time, since the day of her Baptism some eighty four years ago. Jesus had come to her and touched her through the water and Word of Baptism; Jesus had united my grandmother with His death and resurrection, but Jesus still hid the glory of His face. My grandmother had a life of

picking up her cross and following after Jesus ahead of her. My grandmother struggled with her cross like we all do. She struggled with the sinfulness of her own flesh. She worried about life; her thoughts were impure; at times she was angry with family and friends; and various fears assailed her. In her last years and days, my grandmother became very impatient about seeing Jesus; she wanted the suffering of the present to end. She wanted to see Jesus, but the waiting continued. The Word of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection and His body and blood sustained her while she waited. And now my grandmother is no longer waiting to see Jesus; she died in Christ and now sees the Lord in His glory, a vision that will only get better at the Resurrection.

But we are waiting. We are still daily picking up our crosses and following after Jesus. We still struggle with the sinfulness of our flesh. We battle temptations. We worry for life. We struggle with sickness and illnesses. We suffer from evil in the world. We become impatient. We get distracted. We fear.

Yet we are not left alone. Jesus is with us in the Word of His suffering, death, and resurrection and in His body and blood. Jesus' full glory is hidden from us, but He meets our need and weakness with the cross. Jesus comes to us, speaks to us, and touches our lips with His body and blood to forgive and renew us. Jesus' Word of the cross is exactly what we need here and now as we daily pick up our crosses and follow after Jesus. In fact it is this same Word of the cross that gives us the promise of seeing the glory of Jesus' face in death and in the resurrection.

According to His Father's will, Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Jesus did this by standing with sinners in His baptism, by standing in their place. Jesus did this by dying in place of sinners upon the cross as the ransom for the many. In Jesus' transfiguration we get a glimpse of Jesus' divine glory, that He who died for us is not only true man, but true God. We are taught that the way to glory is through the cross of Christ. So daily pick up your cross and follow after Jesus' trusting in the Word of cross, which promises resurrection and the seeing of Jesus' glory face to face, Amen.