

## THIS IS MY SON... LISTEN TO HIM!

Sermon for the Transfiguration of our Lord, 2018

Mark 9:2-9

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Mark 9:2-9 **After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him, and led them up onto a high mountain, by themselves and alone. He was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and His clothes became dazzling and very white, whiter than any launderer on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> Then Elijah appeared to them together with Moses, and they began to talk with Jesus.**

<sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!” <sup>6</sup>For he did not know what to say, because they had become very afraid. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud came and overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud: “This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!” <sup>8</sup> Suddenly, as they looked around, they did not see anyone with them any more except Jesus only. <sup>9</sup> While they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Big things happen on high mountains in the Bible. We can recall that Noah’s ark landed on the mountains of Ararat,<sup>1</sup> and there God promised never again to flood the entire earth. Abraham climbed a hill with Isaac before God provided a ram.<sup>2</sup> Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments,<sup>3</sup> and the transfiguration of Jesus is no exception. Mark tells us that **after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him, and led them up onto a high mountain, by themselves and alone. He**

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 8:4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 22:2-13

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 19:20

**was transfigured before them<sup>3</sup> and His clothes became dazzling and very white, whiter than any launderer on earth could bleach them.**

What happened on the mountain was startling. Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John with Him, but Luke tells us in his account of the transfiguration that they had fallen asleep (Luke 9:32). The three awoke and saw Jesus. His clothes were an unearthly white, and His face shone like the sun (see Matthew 17:2). This demonstrates that He's not just another man. He's fully human - but He's also fully God. Before Peter, James and John, Jesus gives them a brief glimpse of His heavenly, divine glory. In Exodus 34 we are told that Moses, after spending 40 days on top of Mount Sinai with God, when he returned to the people, *the skin of his face was radiant because God had been speaking to him* (Ex. 34:29). Here, on the mountain, Jesus was not glowing in a reflected glory of God, but the radiance came from within, a revelation of His divine nature. This supports what Peter previously had said: "*You are the Christ,*" (Mark 8:29), "*the Son of the living God,*" (Matthew 16:16).

But this wasn't all those three disciples were privileged to experience. With Jesus in glory there also appeared Moses and Elijah.

Moses was the representative of the Law. The Law (Torah) meant not only the commandments but the entire good and gracious will of God, including the gospel (see Genesis 3:15 and Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Elijah was the great prophet who by the power of God succeeded in bringing many in Israel back to God at a time when God Himself said, "*I reserve seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal,*" (1 Kings 19:18). The presence and the words of these two prophets assured the disciples that God's purpose was being fulfilled in Christ, in exactly the way Christ had told them. He is the Messiah whom the prophets foretold.

Their presence also has an important message for us today. It shows that Christianity is not a new religion - a breakaway from the Old Testament faith. It is the continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament. Christianity began in the Garden of Eden and will reach its marvellous climax on Judgment Day. Those who reject Christ actually reject Moses and Elijah, even though they may use their words in their religious ceremonies. Moses and Elijah are on the side of Christ.

We can understand Peter's reaction as he said, **““Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!”** Undoubtedly it was to prolong the thrilling experience, but then the disciples would have failed to receive the greatest lesson of all.

Suddenly they were enveloped by a cloud. From the cloud the voice of the heavenly Father said: **“This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!”** In a glorious, thunderous way that complements Jesus’ dazzling appearance, God declares that Jesus is His Son. Undoubtedly these words also strengthened Jesus in His determination to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Yet the words were addressed specifically to the disciples. God assured them of the fact that Jesus *is* His Son, that God the Father *loves* His Son and *approved* of what Jesus was doing, and that when Jesus spoke, He spoke the truth. He is God’s beloved Son, sent by the Father to do the Father’s will of salvation.

Peter, James and John get a glimpse of heavenly glory. They normally see Jesus as an ordinary humble human being going about His work. But here, for a brief time, they see Him glorious. But it doesn’t last long. God the Father recedes and the prophets disappear, leaving only the very ordinary-looking human Jesus standing in front of three bewildered disciples.

We know the story, and we know what it teaches. Now we must ask the question, “So what?” Why is Jesus transfigured, and why in front of Peter, James and John?

We don’t know all of the reasons why; but we do know some. Jesus has already begun to tell the disciples that He is going to save the world not by glorious triumph, but by His death on the cross. His enemies have already begun to plot His death, and He is on His way to crucifixion. Peter, James and John will see Him on the cross as the weakest and most condemned man on earth, but before then, here, they see Him transfigured and divine. In fact, from here on in the disciples will see Jesus rejected, arrested, tried and crucified, with no glory to be seen. They’ll see Him risen from the dead, and they’ll watch Him ascend into heaven - but no more dazzling white that the Scriptures record. After He’s ascended, they’ll go and proclaim the Gospel. Yes, the Church will grow as disciples are baptised and instructed - just as it does today. In the meantime, the disciples will face setback, suffering and even death themselves. Life on sinful earth will be like it always is: no heavenly glory, but labour and trouble - and hope. Why hope? Because of what the Father said at the Transfiguration: **“This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!”** Hear Him. Long after the glory is disappeared, the disciples will still have Jesus’ Word, His Law and Gospel - His faith-giving, enlivening Word. Even though they won’t see more glory in this world, they have God’s Word that heaven is theirs. They have God’s Word that they’ll see His glory again.

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So it was for Peter, James and John, but what about us?

As we delve into some applications, we do well to remember: the disciples had the joy of witnessing Jesus' glory at the transfiguration before proclaiming it. Not one of us were there on the mountain that day, and we don't get to see Jesus' dazzling glory on this side of heaven unless He returns soon. But we have something better: we have the Word. Although we haven't seen the transfiguration with our eyes, we've *heard* the transfiguration with our ears. To put it in the language of the text, we don't see God's beloved Son, but we hear Him.

Theology is the art of making distinctions, and there are two basic ways to run theology - either a theology of *glory* or a theology of the *cross*. If you're a theologian of glory, you go by what you see. You go by what you feel. You look for God in glorious things on earth - beautiful sunsets, high health and exciting experiences. Worship is about excitement and motivation. The better you feel, the surer you are of your salvation.

If you're a theologian of the cross, you operate differently. At the cross, the Lord won salvation even though it didn't look glorious: His power and glory were hidden under suffering and death. If you are a theologian of the cross, then you *trust* that Jesus' death is your salvation not because it looked good, but because you hear in His Word that there Christ saved you. Hearing His Word, you don't look for God to act in glorious ways; but like the cross, you look for God to work in ways where His glory is hidden. Consider, after all, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These don't look spectacular - but they are Sacraments in which God gives you forgiveness for all of your sins. It may not *feel* exciting - but that is where you find forgiveness, life and salvation.

So as Christians in this world, as theologians of the cross, we don't go with our eyes. Even at the transfiguration, God the Father said, "**Listen to Him!**" not "See Him." In fact, often you will find that you trust the Lord's Word despite what you must see.

So, what spiritual insight should you draw from this episode in the life of Jesus? You didn't get to go up on the mountain and see a preview of His glory – and you've seen that even having the experience did not prove particularly helpful to those who did. So what's the point? The answer was given by the voice from the cloud: "**This is My Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!**"

Jesus is the divine Son of God and our Saviour from sin even when we don't see and experience wonderful and glorious things. We live in a sinful world, and while we want to see heavenly glory, there's not much heavenly glory to be seen in a sinful

world. There's worldly glory, and plenty of that to distract us and lead us away from the faith. But Jesus is completely accessible at all times – not to view in visions of glory, but rather to hear. The voice of God said, “**Listen to him!**” We can do that any time. His Words that are recorded in the Holy Scriptures are the Words that cleave the darkness and make His light shine in our hearts. His Word is the light in the darkness no matter how terrifying or dreary outward circumstances in our lives become. To the Word of Christ, we are drawn to receive His forgiveness, His wisdom, His guidance, and His Holy Spirit who allows us to experience Jesus as our Lord - not to miracles, or to uplifting feelings of enthusiasm, or to successes in business.

The Lord provides many days of happiness in this world, but there are other days when we've got to grit our teeth, say “I am baptised!” and endure. And quite frankly, there will be times each day, or days and days, when we fail to live under the cross - when we give into this temptation or that one, when we cling to false glories of the world rather than God's grace, when we fail to speak grace to our family, when we despair instead of rejoice.

It will be no different as long as we're in this inglorious world. But repent - and rejoice that we are not forsaken. The glorious Son of God became flesh in this world to deliver us to heaven.

We don't see His glory, but we hear His grace. For now, we live by faith, but one day that faith will turn to sight, and we will be with Jesus in heaven, because all our sins have been forgiven. Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR TRANSFIGURATION

Almighty God, Your ears are always open to the prayers of Your people. Hear now the cries of Your children, as we bring before You our needs of body and soul.

Above all else, we praise You for the precious gift of Your Son. Today in particular we bless You for the message of His transfiguration. Through this mighty sign give to us and all people a clearer vision and a higher knowledge of Christ's person and mission. Give us eyes of faith that see the glory of His deity, and the glory that came through His cross, and lead us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Grant that, as we continue to see the glory of His person in Your Word and Sacrament, we may know and believe in Him as the Light of the world, the Sun of righteousness, and the visible likeness of Your very being. May we continually hear

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the voice of Jesus Your prophet still today, that our faith may constantly be renewed. Grant that, as Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in glory, each of us may die in faith, share in the power of Christ's resurrection, and be eventually transformed into ever greater glory.

Let Your Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles, live in our poor bodies. Transform our weak, sinful lives so that they shine with goodness, purity, and righteousness. Transform our minds, eyes, judgment, and our whole persons, so that they may reflect the mind of Christ. Take away our sickness, pains, wounds, and hurts. Take away our disappointments, defeats, and despair. Take away our sorrows and grieving. Take away our pride, anger, hatred and fear. Take away our selfishness and envy, our laziness and unconcern for others. Take away all our weaknesses, and turn them by the touch of Jesus into impulses, motives, thoughts, words, and deeds that shine with godliness and new life.

Grant Your blessing to Your church. Especially bless all who belong to the fellowship of this congregation. Be present with all our members and graciously supply what they need. Grant that we, and all who bear the name of Christ, may daily offer to You acceptable spiritual sacrifices of repentance, thanksgiving, and obedience.

Look mercifully on our state and our nation. Deliver us from those who love evil and whose aim is unrighteousness. Grant that the whole world may know Your will, and all nations may know Your salvation.

Have mercy on those among us who are sick, lonely, or depressed. Teach them to look to You for healing, comfort, and stronger hope for the glory to come.

Loving Father, as we trust that You are near to us when we call to You, hear our prayer, and grant all our petitions for Christ's sake. Amen.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

2 Kings 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup> When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah told Elisha: "Please stay here! For the LORD has sent me to Bethel."

Elisha answered: "As surely as the LORD lives, and as surely as your soul lives, I will not leave you."

So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> Some of the disciples of the prophets who were at Bethel approached Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?"

“Yes, I know it too,” Elisha replied, “Keep quiet!”

<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah told him, “Elisha, please stay here! For the LORD has sent me to Jericho.”

However, he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives, and as surely as your soul lives, I will not leave you!”

So they went to Jericho.

<sup>5</sup> A company of the prophets who were at Jericho approached Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?”

“Yes, I know it too,” he replied, “Keep quiet!”

<sup>6</sup> Then Elijah told him: “Please stay here! For the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.”

Elisha answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, and as surely as your soul lives, I will not leave you!”

So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty disciples of the prophets also went and stood, facing these two men at a distance, while they stopped at the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Elijah took his outer garment and rolled it up. He struck the water, and it was divided on the one side and on the other, and the two men went across on dry ground. <sup>9</sup> When they had gone across, Elijah told Elisha, “Before I am taken away from you, ask me what I may do for you!”

Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me!”

<sup>10</sup> Elijah said: “You have asked for a difficult thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, let it be so for you! However, if you do not see me, it will not be so.”

<sup>11</sup> They continued to talk as they walked along. Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

<sup>12</sup> When Elisha saw this, he cried out: “My father! My father! The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!”

Then Elisha did not see him any more. He took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:1-6

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we have such hope, we speak very frankly. <sup>13</sup> We are not like Moses, who used to “put a veil over his face” to keep the Israelites from gazing at the end of the glory while it was fading away. <sup>14</sup> However, their minds were made dull. For to this day the same veil remains when the Old Testament is being read, and is not removed, because only in Christ is it done away with. <sup>15</sup> Rather, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> However, “whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” <sup>17</sup> This “Lord”

is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.<sup>18</sup> As we all reflect “the glory of the Lord” in our unveiled faces, we are being transformed into the same likeness, from glory to glory, just as it comes from the “Lord,” who is the Spirit.

<sup>4:1</sup> Therefore, since we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we do not become discouraged;<sup>2</sup> but we have renounced hidden and shameful ways. We do not live by trickery, nor do we falsify the Word of God. Rather, by making the truth plain, we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.<sup>3</sup> If our Good News has been veiled, it has been veiled to those who are perishing.<sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, with the result that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine on them.<sup>5</sup> We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.<sup>6</sup> For it is God, who said, “Let light shine out of the darkness!” who has shone in our hearts, in order to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9:2-9

<sup>2</sup> After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him, and led them up onto a high mountain, by themselves and alone. He was transfigured before them,<sup>3</sup> and His clothes became dazzling and very white, whiter than any launderer on earth could bleach them.<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah appeared to them together with Moses, and they began to talk with Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!”

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<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, as they looked around, they did not see anyone with them any more except Jesus only.<sup>9</sup> While they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.