

Transfiguration Sunday - February 19, 2023

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

The Holy Gospel

P: The season of Epiphany reaches its climax this day of Transfiguration. We now hear of the Transfiguration from Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 17:1-9)

P: 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, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. 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." 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." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 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."

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise be to You, O Christ.

Opening Hymn: "O Wondrous Type! O Vision Fair" – Hymn #413

The Call to Worship:

C: Lord Jesus Christ, You are the light of the world. Wise men, guided by light, came to worship You, and we kneel in spirit with them. You calmed the storm, healed the hurting, and released the imprisoned soul; You gave to us the peace of God, the power of hope, and the liberty of forgiveness.

P: Now, with Your disciples, You ascend the Mount of Transfiguration, there to converse with Lawgiver Moses and Prophet Elijah. Prepare our hearts to hear the Father's words that place His signature on You: "This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him."

C: Through You, Lord Jesus, God places His signature on us. By faith we are beloved children of the heavenly Father.

P: The time comes when our Lord must descend the mountain and enter the valley—the valley of rejection, of denial, and of crucifixion. Lent must come soon.

C: Lord, grant that we follow You into the valley, for even in the valley of the shadow of death, life does not end. Easter follows, and life begins again. Teach us to live as Your resurrection people, O Lord,

ALL: and let the joy of Easter victory that always follows the time in the valley transform this service of worship into a celebration on the mountain of faith, that

we may all say, "Tis good, Lord, to be here."

Hymn of Praise: *"Tis Good Lord to Be Here"* – Hymn #414

Entrance Psalm:

P: Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy mountain;

C: for the LORD our God is holy!

P: The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!

C: He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

P: The LORD is great in Zion;

C: He is exalted over all the peoples.

P: Let them praise Your great and awesome name!

C: Holy is He!

P: The King in His might loves justice.

C: You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

P: Exalt the LORD our God; worship at His footstool!

C: Holy is He!

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy mountain;

C: for the LORD our God is holy!

P: O God, in the transfiguration of Your Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud You foreshadowed our adoption as Your children.. Make us with the King heirs of Your glory and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, one and forever.

C: Amen.

Sunday School Prek-1st grade Anthem:

Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 24:8-18

R: And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And He did not lay His hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. 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." So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. 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." Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 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. 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. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Epistle Lesson: 2 Peter 1:16-21

R: 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. 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," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 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, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Sermon Hymn: "*Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory*" - **Hymn #416**

Sermon: "*Face to Face with God*" - **Exodus 24:8-18**

After weeks of trying to keep up with the lectures, you have finally made an appointment to see the professor. Or you are about to do an interview with a company headhunter. Or after days of thinking about that girl or boy you finally get the nerve to introduce yourself to that person. After years of being taken for granted at work, you finally get the nerve to approach the boss and ask for a raise. In each case you are about to talk to someone you have noticed before, but only from a distance. So it can be frightening to meet them face-to face.

Can you imagine meeting God face-to-face? What would it be like? Would He be a kindly, old man dressed in white with a long beard in a white robe with a halo over his head? Would he look like George Burns in "O God," or Morgan Freeman in "Bruce Almighty?" Or the figure in "Monty Python and the Holy Grail"?

Moses and the elders of Israel got to see God face-to face. "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel." Back in chapter 19 of Exodus we hear this about where they were at Mt. Sinai:

There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it with fire. The smoke billowed up from

it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.

Stand by a jet engine as it revs up. Look straight down a 2,000 foot cliff. Feel the heat of a blast furnace. Those are things that can make us hesitate and freeze. We realize how small and weak we are compared to the power of a jet engine, the height of a cliff or the heat of a furnace. That is what happens when people are in the presence of God. Isaiah's reaction to being in the presence of God was to say, "Woe is me for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the LORD of hosts." The shepherds froze in fear when God sent the angels to them on Christmas night. Paul and his soldiers were thrown to the ground when they encountered God on the way to Damascus. Face-to-face to God is terrifying.

In the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark" the hero of the story is looking for the long lost Ark of the Covenant. When the ark is opened at the end of the movie, all who are looking at it cannot bear it and are grotesquely destroyed. The movie was of course a Hollywood image, but it does give us an impression of what it is like to stand face-to-face in the presence of God. Why is it that way?

Because God is holy. But what is holy? We may say "Holy cow!" or "Holy mackerel!" but what does that mean? Normally we think of "holy" as being "perfect." A "holy" person never does anything wrong. That person never drinks, smokes, wastes his time, or has fun. Singer Billy Joel said in his song, "Only the Good Die Young," "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than die with the saints." We use the expression "holy rollers" to describe people who think they are holy. Isn't "to err" human? If so, then instead of trying to be holy, why not just accept ourselves the way we are?

Think about this in terms of TV. In the 1990's TV heroes were on "NYPD Blues" or "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Comedy heroes were absent minded teenagers to families experiencing the hilarious side of suburban life. Then with the "Sopranos" came a new set of "heroes." In shows like "Breaking Bad," "Mad Man," and "Games of Thrones" the "heroes" are bad guys. Why? Because they are more interesting. And we end up thinking, "They are not all that bad."

We need to understand what "holy" means. It means a lot more than "perfect." It means "other," "set apart." God is holy because He is set apart, beyond us. To approach God would be like taking a rocket ship to the sun. It would be brilliant and spectacular, but we would never survive it. One glimpse of God would destroy us. He is too powerful, too bright, too much for us. In the presence of God evil and bad is a big deal. We may laugh at it now, but we each will have to face that holy God.

Only then do we see how big a deal it is that the holy, devastatingly unapproachable God is also our Savior Christ Jesus. If we try to pick up a tiny bug with our big hands, we might crush it. But with a delicate instrument we can. Jesus is God become human, become totally approachable for us. Though we are unclean with sin, Jesus entered our world of sin. He didn't

daintily avoid sinful people like we carefully step around puddles of melted snow. He rolled up His sleeves and touched the sick, the dying, the confused, and the lonely. He got His hands, His arms, all of Himself filthy dirty in our unholy world.

Later in our worship service we will partake of Holy Communion. Moses and the elders got to see God and share a meal. In the ancient world if you ate a meal with someone, you were close to that person. That is why many people spoke against Jesus when He ate with tax collectors and other “sinful” people. God invites us, not just once, but again and again to share His supper in Holy Communion. It is not something casual or just a nice thing to do. We unholy, sinful people get to dine and be intimate with the Holy God.

Moses, Aaron and those 72 other men got to see God, but only for a while. Likewise Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, but only for a while. But in Jesus we get to see the holy God each and every day. Jesus tells us that “where two or more are gathered in My name, I am with them.” Anytime we are sharing with other Christians, Jesus is there. And Jesus said, “What you do to one of the least of these, you do to Me.” Anytime we see someone who needs our love, we see Jesus.

On the internet there is a segment showing pop singer Billy Joel doing a lecture to students at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. During the question and answer time a group of students gets the singer’s attention and points to one student. The student asks if he could play on the piano Joel’s song “New York State of Mind” while Joel sings it. There is a brief pause until Joel says, “Okay.” Imagine the thrill it must have been for that student.

But that is what God does for us in Jesus. The God who is holy, way beyond us “on stage,” “off limits,” to us like the people of Israel could not approach God on Mt. Sinai, says to us “okay.” He accepts us on to His stage to “make music” with Him. He doesn’t need us. He can do it all better than we ever can, but in His love for us He invites us to do it with Him.

Think of the child who gets to show his friends who his father is. Even though dad is a lot bigger and as Bill Cosby’s dad used to always say, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out,” he knows that dad loves him. How much more because of Jesus we know the mighty, holy God loves us—and we want to show our friends who He is! For through us they can see Jesus. They can be face-to-face with our almighty, but all-loving God!

Nicene Creed: (Inside back cover of the hymnal)

Prayer of the Church:

P: Lord in Your mercy . . .

C: Hear our prayer.

ALL: O Lord, graciously receive our prayers and supplications which we bring before You with thanksgiving; and grant that we, whom You in grace have heard, may be genuinely thankful to You, praise Your holy Name, and ever increase in Your

love and service through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering & Voluntary:

The Confession:

P: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.

C: If we walk in the light as God Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

P: God does not want us to perish, but to come to His life-giving light.

P: Almighty God,

C: You dwell in light unapproachable. Unprotected, we perish in Your presence. For our hearts are darkened, our minds be clouded; we call for night to cover our deeds; we have loved darkness rather than the light.

P: Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.

C: For His sake we beg forgiveness.

P: For His sake God hears your prayer. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

C: We have seen the Lord's glory; we have heard the Lord's voice.

P: Walk, then, as children of light in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

The Preface:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up unto the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God.

C: It is good and proper so to do.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P: It is truly good, right, and proper that we should... evermore praising You and saying:

C: Christ of glory, hidden power stirring the heart of matter, glowing center in which the unnumbered strands of the manifold are knit together; strength inexorable as the world and warm as life; You whose brow is of snow, whose eyes are of fire, whose feet are more dazzling than gold poured from the furnace; you whose hands hold captive the stars; You, who gather up in Your superabundant oneness every delight, every taste, every energy, every phase of existence, to You my being cries out with a longing as vast as the universe; for You indeed are my Lord and my God.

Lord's Prayer: (Inside back cover of the hymnal)

The Words of our Lord:

P: When we eat this bread we share the body of Christ. When we drink from this cup we share the blood of Christ.

C: **Reveal Yourself to us O Lord, in the breaking of bread, as You once revealed Yourself on the Mount of Transfiguration.**

Distribution of Holy Communion

"Jesus on the Mountain Peak" – **Hymn #415**

"Alleluia! Let Praises Ring!" – **Hymn #822**

Dismissal:

Prayer After Communion:

P: Almighty God, on the mountain You showed Your glory in the transfiguration of Your Son. Give us the vision to see beyond the turmoil of our world and to behold the King in all His glory, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *"Alleluia, Song of Gladness"* – **Hymn #417**

(We sing this hymn to remind ourselves that we will not sing "Alleluia" again until Easter as we journey through Lent.)

Postlude