

26 February 2006  
The Transfiguration of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The ‘Good’ Life”  
Text: Mark 9:2-9;

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**“Rabbi, it is good that we are here.”** Thus spoke Peter. To which we want to say, “Duh!” (To quote my children!) Peter, master of the understatement! Master of stating the obvious! Of course it’s good to be there! Just look at who is there and what is happening right before your eyes! Geesh, Peter! Couldn’t you come up with anything better than that?

But maybe we shouldn’t be so hard on Peter. Maybe he is saying more than we think he is. Maybe the problem isn’t so much what Peter said, but what we heard. And it centers on the meaning of the word *good*. For what did Peter mean by that? Was he simply making a comparison – that here is better than there? *That’s* the obvious. But the word *good* in the Scriptures often means much more than that. It is not just a comparison word, or a quality word – it is a perfection word; a creation word; an Eden word; a Paradise word. It is what the world was before sin, when in the beginning God created everything that exists out of nothing, and it was *good*. Everything holy, perfect, and blameless. Until in the last verse of Genesis chapter 1 we hear: **“*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and morning, the sixth day.*”**

And there’s the next connection, for Mark tells us that it was **“*after six days*”** that Jesus took His three disciples with Him up onto that mountain. After six days – the same time period after creation was complete and perfect, yet before sin. . . . And then what happened to Jesus? **“*[H]e was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.*”** It was something not of this sinful world. Before the stain and Fall. Pure white, as opposed to the blackness of our sin.

And so there, on the mountain, the world created *good* but turned bad was *good* again.

And not just better, but restored. There, on the mountain, sin is swallowed up, there is the glory of God, the company of Heaven. Like it was meant to be! In the beginning. The only thing missing from the scene is Adam! . . . *Or is he?*

Actually, he is there! Standing between Moses and Elijah. Oh, not the first Adam, the first perfect man who brought down this world in his sin; the second Adam, the second perfect man who came to be the Saviour. The One Moses and Elijah and all the prophets had proclaimed and preached and pointed to. The Son of God become man, to undo, reverse, and restore what man had done. To make creation new again. . . . And so Peter got it partly right! He was thinking along the right lines and in the right terms. But as much as it may have looked “**good to be there,**” **all was not good yet.** The second Adam still had work to do to make everything good again. Sin would not be swallowed up in the glory of God, and it would not happen on that mountain. No, the *good* mountain would be Calvary, the day would be *Good Friday*, and sin would be swallowed up in the cross – in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is what would make everything *good* again. That is what would provide forgiveness of sin, new life, and new creation. And that is what Peter and the others still had to learn . . . *and it is what you and I still have to learn.*

*Yes, we still have to learn it.* Oh, I know – we think we know it! That we’ve learned that. We know about the cross. We know about forgiveness. Oh, we know now so much more than Peter, don’t we? . . . Well, no. Like Peter, we think along the right lines and in the right terms, but we fall into the same trap. Wanting it to ***be good to be here***; wanting the glory now, on earth; wanting the triumph and victory now. We want to escape this world like Elijah did – if not whisked *physically* off to Heaven, then at least to live that triumphant life here and now in soul and spirit. Sinning less, being more holy, more pious, becoming . . . *good!* Yes, that is what we want, isn’t it? To be *good* Christians? Eden Christians, restored Christians, *in the beginning* Christians. Transcending the sin and evil in this world; in our lives, in our congregation, in the Church. To be what others are not! And to live and stay not where the sin is, but where it is good.

But as good as that sounds, is it not good. That may be our idea of good, and it may seem better than what we got now! But it is not God’s idea of good. For in this world, there is no such thing as a *good* Christian. For the sin and evil that is such a problem in this world isn’t just *out there*, like some force or germs floating around, trying to get us, and that we try to avoid! No, sin and evil are always personal. Sin and evil always have a home where they live. And that home is in *this* heart. And in *your* heart. And honestly, there are times when we hate that fact, and the sin in our hearts is like the bad houseguest

that will never go home! And there are times when we fluff the pillows, turn down the sheets, and put a mint on the pillow for the sin we like, and wouldn't mind it stayin' for a while! The juicy gossip, the hatred, the feelings of superiority, the love of our stuff, the lust, the laziness . . . what is it for you?

And so the truth is that there is no *good* place in this world, a place where we can live without sin, because we keep bringing it with us! The top of that mountain might have been good if Peter, James, and John hadn't been there! But they were what made it not good. *And so there's the catch* – we want to live where it is good, but as soon as we get there, it isn't! As soon as we get there, *there goes the neighborhood!* Who let *them* in?

And yet Peter, you were right. It was *good* to be there. But not because of the glory, but because the Good One was there. **For just as where we are it cannot be good, where He is it must be good.** For He has come to make it good. And so as we have been hearing this Epiphany season, *where Jesus is, it is good again*. Lepers are cleansed, fevers are healed, paralytics walk again, sins are forgiven. Yet this goodness, this “good-ing,” comes at a price. And the price is that the Good One who is making us good, at the same time makes Himself not good. He cleanses us and diseases Himself. He heals us and cripples Himself. He forgives us by putting our sin on Himself. The guilt of all the not good we are He takes on Himself, so that when He goes to the cross, His Father is completely justified in forsaking Him. For He is not condemning and turning His back on His Son, but on the worst sinner who ever lived.

And you know what we say to that? What we say as we look at the horrible price of our sin? What we say at the foot of the cross? ***“It is good that we are here.”*** *And we speak the truth.* For the good place is not where we think the glory is; where we want to be. The good place is where it looked the most not good! Where God showed His true glory, and where He wants us to be.

And that is what Peter still had to learn, and what we still have to learn. **That it is not good to be where sin is not – for there is no such place here on earth! It is good to be where sin is taken away – for there is such a place for us.** And it is where the cross still is; where the death and resurrection of Jesus still is for us. It is here, at the font, in the water of Holy Baptism, where the Word of God washes us clean. It is here, at the altar, in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, where the Word and the body and blood of God feeds us and makes us whole again. It is here, at the bar of confession, where the Word of God spoken from the cross is spoken to us again, ***“Father, forgive them.”*** It is here, where we ***“listen to Him”***; where our Saviour is preached and preached into us. . . .

And while here may not look *glorious*, it is *good*. For here, as Paul would write, “***we are being transformed into the image***” – the image of Christ. The image of God that the first Adam lost, now being restored to us in the second Adam. Restored in us as we are transformed from sinners to sons. Transformed by the cross. Transformed, not by improving ourselves, but by dying and rising with Christ. Transformed not by effort, but by forgiveness.

*And you are.* It is good to be here. Not because you can see it. Not because it looks glorious, and we look glorious, and look how good we are. No! It is because we listen to Him, to Christ, and He says it is. For what He says, is. Just as when He spoke and it was so in the beginning, so He speaks and it is so now. . . . And so who are you? You are who He says you are. His child. Still a sinner, yes. But against whom He no longer holds any sin or guilt. For that has been taken away from you. The bedsheets of your heart-guest sin, Jesus not only took, but has left in the grave. And now the fluffed pillows, turned back sheets, and mint on the pillow is what awaits you in Heaven. In the home Jesus has gone to prepare for you.

And it will be good to be there. But it is also good to be here. Here, now, as we enter the season of Lent. Here, now, as we confess and repent. Here, now, as we receive the goodness of forgiveness. Here and now, as we live the life of forgiveness given to us out in the world. We should not rush through Lent to get to Easter. That is what Peter was up to. No, we must learn. Our goal is not to escape this world to glory, but to live in this world and be “***transformed from one degree of glory to another.***” First the glory of the cross, then the glory of Heaven. For only as we trust the good of the first, will we see the good of the second. And that is exactly where our Father would have us be.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.