

Jesu Juva

“It’s Never Just Jesus”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21

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

Jesus in His glory. Me with Jesus in His glory. Me and my friends with Jesus and His friends in His glory. Sounds good to me! I’m with Peter - I want that. I’d want to stay. And get away from all the troubles of this world and life. Get away from the sadness and death. Get away from the struggles and darkness, the pain and sin. Cause it’s hard, you know? I know you know. It’s hard to endure it yourself. It’s hard to have to watch others struggle. It’s hard to be under attack from the evil one, who relents only long enough for you to let your guard down, so he can worm his way in a little deeper and a little stronger.

So I’m with Peter. ***Lord, it is good that we are here.*** *Good* is what God called creation before the fall into sin. Before all the trouble started. Before pain and struggle, fear and death reared its ugly head. A little *heaven on earth* - perhaps that’s what Peter was thinking. This, here, is good again. And who wouldn’t want to stay there?

Well, *Jesus* didn’t want to stay there! Oh, He wanted things to be good again, but that wasn’t going to happen on this mountain. Here, on this mountain of transfiguration, Jesus showed His glory. The glory He always had as *God of God and Light of Light*. The glory that was His as the eternal Son of God. The glory that was hidden, buried deep down in His humanity, from the moment He was conceived by the Holy Spirit to that day on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, and Peter, James, and John.

But Jesus didn’t come just to *show* His glory - that wouldn’t do us any good. That wouldn’t restore us to good. And that’s why Jesus came - to “good” us; to give His glory to us. And where that would take place was not on this mountain of transfiguration, but on the mountain called Golgotha, or Calvary. The mountain Peter and the others didn’t want to stay at; the one they ran away from in fear. That’s the mountain Jesus *wanted* to go to . . . and stay. That’s the mountain where Jesus wants not just a certain three disciples - but the whole world - to see Him. There. On the cross. His glory. For you.

So Jesus didn’t want to stay in His transfiguration. And He commands Peter, James, and John *not to tell anyone about it*. Not yet, at least. And I assume that includes the other nine disciples. Did you ever think about that? Not even *they* were to know about it. Because something better is coming. Something more important is coming. The time would come for them to tell the whole world, either through their preaching or through

the Scriptures they would write - as we read in the Epistle earlier when Peter writes about this event. But for now the glory is hidden again. For now it's just Jesus again.

*Just Jesus.* But honestly, sometimes that doesn't seem enough, does it? We know it should be. By faith we know it is. But when life is pressing heavily down upon you, when the problems pile up and won't go away, when it's just one thing after another . . . we don't want *just Jesus*, we want His glory. We want the good *now*, the peace *now*.

I wonder if that's what Peter thought, too, when not too long after this, this One who shone in glory is taken away bound in ropes. When this One who spoke with Moses and Elijah is on trial before Pontius Pilate and being traded for Barabbas. When this One of whom the voice from the cloud said "***This is My beloved Son***" is crucified as a criminal. When this One of whom it was said "***Listen to Him***" has His voice silenced in death. When the good and the glory of the transfiguration must have seemed so very far away and like a dream. When it seemed as if death and evil had won.

But here's the thing: *it's never just Jesus.* The Jesus on the cross is the same Jesus as in His transfiguration. His appearance is the only difference. The *only* difference. In the transfiguration, that's who Jesus is. On the cross, that's who Jesus is **for you**. The One who came to take your place under sin and in death. The glorious for the inglorious. The strong for the weak. God for man. For truly, that's not just a man dying on the cross, as some would have you believe. If that were so, we would have no Saviour. But that's not just a man - it's Jesus. It's the Jesus of the transfiguration.

And so shine Jesus shine becomes die Jesus die, and that's better. *That's* where we need to stay. And the season of Lent takes us there again. To see our Saviour. To see His glory *on the cross*. The event of the Transfiguration used to be celebrated in the church in the middle of the summer, on August 6th, for no particular reason that I know of. Then it was moved in the church year to the final Sunday in the Epiphany season, to just before Lent begins, so that it will be for us what it was for Peter, James, and John - the glory that we need to see before seeing Jesus on the cross. That as we journey to the cross, we know the Son of God on the cross aright.

And though we were not there on the mount of transfiguration, and we did not see with our physical eyes the glory and radiancy of Jesus shining, and Him with Moses and Elijah, and we did not hear with our physical ears the voice of the Father from the cloud, that's okay. Only three persons did, after all. But we know it true for we have, as Peter said, ***something more sure***. Something more lasting and sure than a fleeting glimpse of glory. We have, Peter said, ***the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention to as a lamp shining in a dark place***. And so what shines into all of our dark places, all of our struggles, all of our difficulties and pains, is the Word. The Word which tells us of our merciful Father who sent His Son, of our loving Saviour who came to give

us His glory through His death and resurrection, and of the Spirit who is given to be with us in all the times and places of our lives. Not just for a short time of transfiguration.

But in the same way as *just Jesus* is never just Jesus, but the glorious Jesus, just with that glory hidden, so the Word is never *just the Word* (that maybe doesn't seem to be enough in our problem and trouble filled lives) - it is the living and active Word, the Spirit-filled Word, the Word which gives what it says. The Word that is not just information to fill our brains, but power to fill our lives. **And it is the Word which reveals to us that the Jesus of the transfiguration and the Jesus of the cross is now the Jesus of the font, the pulpit, and the altar.** For these are the places the same Jesus has promised to be for us today in His glory, with His forgiveness, with His strength, and with His transfiguring grace, to give us a glory and a kingdom which will never end.

All of that, all of those glorious promises and realities, are for now, like the glory of Jesus on the cross: *hidden*. These things don't look glorious, the church they're in may not look glorious, and your lives may not be glorious. But as Jesus told Thomas after His resurrection: ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*** (John 20:29).

That's you. And that's better. For while the vision of the transfiguration lasted but a moment, the blessing of the Word which changes us lasts forever. And while you didn't get to hear Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, you get to hear something even better: Jesus talking **to you**. Telling you: *I baptize you*. Telling you: *I forgive you all your sins*. Telling you: *This is My Body, This is My Blood*. And don't think: oh, that's just the Pastor. For just as *just Jesus* is not just Jesus, and *just the Word* is not just the Word, so *just the Pastor* is part of the hiddenness of the glory. For while it is true that your Pastor is not very glorious, what he preaches and gives to you is, when he preaches into your ears and gives into your mouths Jesus. Jesus for your sin. Jesus for your struggles. Jesus for your pain. Jesus for your life.

***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*** We're going to realize that at the end of the upcoming Lenten season again, when the Moses and Elijah of the transfiguration are replaced by thief one and thief two hanging on crosses next to the Jesus of Calvary. When then one thief who turned to Jesus and believed, who asked Jesus to *remember him when He came into His kingdom* (Luke 23:42), did so not because of what He saw but because of what He heard. What He saw was the farthest thing from glory. What He heard was pure glory. And love. The love of God for even a man like him. And for even a man or a woman, a girl or a boy, like you.

So once again today, the Transfiguration of our Lord sends us down into the season of Lent. We'll sing our good-bye to Alleluia at the end of the service (LSB #417), and these white paraments will be replaced by black and purple. But they'll be back. On Easter. Just as Jesus will be back in all His glory on the last day, when the waiting will be over and what we now believe we will then see.

And so we'll sing in that last hymn: *Grant that at the last we may keep thine Easter* - but which Easter is it talking about? The one at the end of Lent or the one at the end of our lives? **Yes**. It's both. Because the Jesus of the transfiguration, the Jesus of Calvary, and the Jesus of the font, the pulpit, and the altar, is the same Jesus who will return and say to you: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43). And all will be fulfilled. And you will take your place in the glory of Jesus, with Moses and Elijah, with that thief, with Peter, James, and John, with Lorena, and with all the blessed who did not see, yet heard and believed. You will take your place there with them, a place reserved for you, to both hear and see that glory, forevermore.

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