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The Transfiguration of Our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“Understanding His Glory”

Text: Mark 9:2-9; 2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:6

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

The whirlwind came, and Elijah was gone. How long had it taken? Did the chariots and horsemen of Israel which divided Elijah and Elisha from one another come and go in an instant? Did Elijah go up quickly? Or did it take some time? We're not told those details, but this we know: **when it was over, Elisha was alone**. The wind was still, the fiery chariots and horsemen were gone, and Elisha was alone. And if he was anything like you and me, sadness filled his heart and questions filled his mind. Things would never be the same again. What was he going to do now? He tore his clothes. A sign of anguish. It's all he knew to do.

*Was it now happening again?*

You see, Peter, James, and John had traveled up a mountain with Jesus, just as Elisha had gone with Elijah. And suddenly, things change! Jesus *is transfigured before them*. His appearance changed. His *clothes became radiant, intensely white*; an *unearthly* white. There were no fiery chariots and horsemen from heaven - instead, in this glory there *appeared Elijah and Moses, and they were talking with Jesus*. Mark doesn't tell us what they were talking about, but Luke does (9:31): they were talking about Jesus' departure; or in Greek, His *exodus*. Or in other words, **Jesus was leaving**.

*So was it happening again? Was Jesus going to be taken up with Elijah, just like Elijah had been before? Was Elisha's anguish now to belong to Peter, James, and John? Perhaps this is why Peter was terrified. Not so much with the glory, as with being left alone.*

So, a little more time! That's all Peter wants. *Just a little more time . . .*

Parents know what that's like, when their children go off to college or move away . . . *if we just had a little more time*. Spouses know what that's like when your loved one is taken in death . . . *if we just had a little more time*. You've all probably felt that before, for one reason or another . . . *if we just had a little more time*.

So Peter tries. For a little more time. ***Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*** A little more time. Just a

little more time . . . Don't leave us yet.

It all must have seemed for naught, though, as after he said that *a cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."* Yes, we listened. He's leaving. And yes, He's your beloved Son. You want Him back. Maybe Peter's hands were even reaching for his clothes, ready to tear them in two . . .

And then it was over. How long had it all taken? How long had Moses and Elijah been there with Jesus? We're not told those details, but this we know: **when it was over, Peter, James, and John were not alone!** The brightness was gone, Moses and Elijah were gone, **but Jesus was still there.** With them. Looking exactly the same as He did before. And as they retraced their steps back down the mountain, Jesus *charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

So yes, Peter, Jesus is going to depart and ascend into heaven. That day is coming. But not before He has *risen from the dead.* Which means not before He dies. Which means not before He is crucified. Which means not before He is arrested, falsely accused, and wrongly convicted. Which means not before He is denied by you, Peter! And not before He is betrayed by one of His closest friends. Which means, yes Peter, *there is a little more time.* For you to see, for you to hear, for you to learn.

You see, Jesus is ready for His departure, Peter. *But you're not.* You're not ready for the cross yet. In fact, it was just about a week before this happened, before the transfiguration happened, when Peter rebuked Jesus for all His talk of being rejected and killed (Mark 8:31-33). He wasn't ready for the cross. And it would be not long after this when James and John would ask Jesus for the seats of honor on His right and left (Mark 10:35ff). They weren't ready for the cross.

But don't be too hard on them. We're no better. We don't get it either. And if you want evidence of that, what do you think about when you hear these words of St. Paul that we heard earlier?

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

So what did you think of when you heard those words? What glory? The glory of heaven? The glory of the transfiguration? The kind of glory that is admired by all? *Why did you not think of the glory of the cross?* Because that's not glorious, right? That's all bloody and gory and tragic.

But see? You need to see and to hear and to learn. **Because the cross, too, is and shows us the glory of the Lord.** His glory *here*, for us. The glory of His mercy and love. And

the transformation that is taking place in us, of which Paul speaks, by *the Lord who is the Spirit*, is the transformation from a sinful, selfish, glory-seeker, to a forgiven, selfless, servant. The transformation from denying the cross to bearing the cross. The transformation from wanting to be served to where we learn to lay down our lives for others. And while the world thinks that the exact opposite of glory, Jesus would have us that there is truly no greater glory in this world than that.

For that is really the departure that Jesus, Elijah, and Moses were talking about on the mountain that day - His exodus from this world when He would lay down His life for us; His exodus through death and the grave. His exodus that the Law and the Prophets, the whole Old Testament, talked about, promised, prophesied, and foreshadowed. It was all about Him, and now it was being fulfilled. All of it. Not one prophecy left unfulfilled, not one law left undone. For *the Son of Man* - the glorious Son of God in human flesh, as seen in the transfiguration - *came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). A ransom, a price, to redeem, to purchase, the world from sin and death - *His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death* (1 Peter 1:18-19). To be our exodus-Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), so that by His blood death not pass us over, but that we pass *through* death to life again, with Him.

And His blood not only does that for us - give us that gift and assurance, that when death comes upon us we need not fear, for we know that Jesus has gone before us and has promised to take us with Him through death to life again - not only that . . . we not only have that assurance, but this promise too: that His blood also changes us, transforms us, even now. His blood poured upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism, His Blood poured into us in His Supper, along with His Body given to us, changes us, transforms us. How could it not? So that the forgiveness we receive is the forgiveness we now give. The mercy we receive is the mercy we now give. The life we receive is the life we now give for others. And in all this, serving others as we have been served. And in that way **living in the image of Christ** and showing His glory.

So when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain there, His glory was revealed, most certainly. The glory He always had as the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. But it was revealed, then, only to three persons.

But when Jesus ascended the cross on the mountain called Calvary, or Golgotha, His glorious mercy and love was revealed for *all the world* to see. For all the world to see that this is the kind of God you have. A God who serves you. Who loves you so much that He would send His Son to die for you. And *that's* the God that Peter, James, and John would *later* proclaim. But not yet. Not until *the Son of Man had risen from the dead*. For *then* they would know and understand the glory of God, the glory of the cross.

And so as we heard Paul write today: *what we proclaim* - what we preach - *is not ourselves*, - that we are anything at all; we're just messengers - *but Jesus Christ as Lord*.

Jesus of Nazareth, as the Lord. Jesus of Nazareth as the one true God. The glorious God who created all things, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who rescued His people from their slavery in Egypt, who took Elijah up in that whirlwind to heaven . . . and who now in these last days died a glorious death on the cross to provide that ransom no one on earth could ever pay. To rescue us now and forever.

Yes, we proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, *with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake*. For once the light of Jesus' love and forgiveness shines on you, it changes you, transforms you, Paul says, *into the same image, from one degree of glory to another*. From the glory of the cross to the glory of eternal life.

So in this Epiphany season now drawing to a close, we have seen this Jesus, the Son of God in human flesh, as the Lord. Now, as we enter into the season of Lent, we will see His glory. We will again journey to His cross, and hear of His love for you and me and for the whole world. We will hear His love as He speaks forgiveness from the cross. And we will learn of His victory over sin, death, and devil as He rises from the dead. And through the hearing of this Word, the Spirit will work in you and transform you into this glory.

For yes, the glory of heaven will one day be yours. Your Father has promised you, and so has Jesus - *for He has gone to prepare a place for you, and so He will come back and take you to be where He is* (John 14:3). As a child of God, you have that promise.

But not yet. For now, you get to be glorious here *for a little more time*. For your friends and neighbors, your family and loved ones. For you to serve them and they you. To proclaim to each other the love of Christ in word and deed. And as you do, that is a glorious thing. To serve the poor and lowly. To forgive and not take revenge. To lift up and not push down. To encourage and not ridicule. To love.

Maybe as you do that, some will not understand. For *the gospel is veiled* to them and they will see just an opportunity to take advantage of you. Don't worry about it. Jesus gave to and forgave even those who put Him on the cross. So you, too. Let Him worry about how it all turns out. He can handle it.

For us, you and me, just *see Jesus only*. Jesus crucified for you, *and* Jesus in your neighbor. And He who came to serve you with His life won't leave you now, but make sure you have all that you need.

So let us now follow Him to His cross this Lenten season, and seeing His glory there, repent of our sins, of our cross-avoiding thinking, and our seeking the wrong kind of glory - and receive His life-changing, mind-altering, heart-transforming forgiveness. Until the veil of sin and death is removed once and for all, and we see then with *unveiled* face, our Lord, not just for a little while, a little more time, but forever.

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 faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.