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The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Voice We Need”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Exodus 24:8-18

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

The divine and human natures of Jesus are on full display today.

The human body which the Son of God has made His own hikes up and down the mountain with Peter, James, and John. But at the top, it is the divine nature that shines. The appearance of Jesus changes before their eyes. He did not become something He was not before, it is that now His eternal glory *is revealed*. The glory of God *usually* hidden in His human flesh now shines brighter than the sun and is whiter than light. It was **good for them to be there**, Peter says. Indeed.

Things quickly get out of hand, though. Overwhelming. Suddenly, it's not so good to be there! It's one thing to witness something, it's quite another to be involved. It's one thing to see Jesus in His glory, talking with Moses and Elijah, it's quite another when that glory begins talking to you! As long as the glory of God is a safe distance away, it's okay. But when **the bright cloud overshadows them**, and Peter, James, and John hear the voice of God speaking to *them*, they are **terrified**. They fall on their faces. They cannot look anymore.

Matthew doesn't tell us how long they were there, flat on their faces, quaking in fear. It was probably a few seconds that felt like eternity. Until they feel a hand on their shoulder, and *another* voice - the one they know. The one that called them from their fishing business. The one they heard praying so often. The one that taught them, spoke the parables, healed so many, and forgave sins. That voice, that *comforting* voice, now saying to them, **Rise, and have no fear**. It's time to go. And when they looked up, it was Jesus. Just Jesus.

Were they disappointed? Disappointed that the glory was gone? Disappointed in themselves, their reaction, that they weren't stronger and able to stand? That it was now just Jesus? Or were they relieved? Well, if they're anything like us, probably all of the above.

When they get to the bottom, back to civilization, things will quickly get back to

normal. Crowds. Disputes. Healing. Opposition. *And their fear would return.* But this time, fear not from the glory of God, but from the fear of men. They would all run away when Jesus is arrested. Peter would deny even knowing this *Jesus of Nazareth* three times. *Who?* Bah. They locked themselves in a room after Jesus was crucified. The Roman soldiers are so strong. The crowd in Pilate's courtyard so large and Peter so all alone. And if the Jewish leaders could get Jesus crucified, what would they now do to them? If only Jesus was still there . . . His hand on their shoulder . . . His voice . . . They didn't need the glory, they just needed Jesus. Just Jesus.

You, too. For if there's one thing we share with the disciples, *it's fear.* Their culture was different, their times were different, **but our fear is the same.** Fear of other people and what they can do to me. Fear that my sin will be found out and the shame I will feel. Fear of the future and what is happening in our world. Fear of being alone. Fear of being forgotten. Fear of failing. Fear of disappointing others. Fear from what I see happening *to* others and *in* others. Fear that I will lose what I love. Fear that I will lose the love of others. Fear for my health. Fear of death.

As long as these things are far away and I don't have to think about them, I'm good. Then *it is good to be here,* in this world and life. But when their dark cloud overshadows us, when they draw near, when my conscience accuses, then they make us terrified. They make us lose sleep. They make us do things we shouldn't do, and wouldn't ordinarily do, and don't want to do, and yet do. Which brings even *more* guilt, *more* shame, *more* fear. It's a deadly spiral. And the harder we try to set ourselves free, the stronger it gets and the faster it goes.

If only Jesus was here . . . His hand on our shoulder . . . His voice . . . Then it would be okay . . .

So Jesus came to those frightened disciples behind locked doors on Easter evening and took away their fear; gave them peace. *And Jesus comes here the same.*

Oh, but it's not the same, Pastor! We can't see Jesus here. We can't touch Him. If only He was, in His glory, in His might . . . and *we'd* be on *our* faces, terrified.

So the key is that voice . . . that voice that came from the bright cloud. That voice that brought fear, but also *pointed the way out of it: **This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*** Don't listen to the voices of those who tell you what to do to be accepted by them, or what you have to do to please them. Don't listen to the voice of the evil one who tells you that your sin is too great to be forgiven, or that you are too far gone. Don't even listen to your own voice that beats yourself up for your failures and is constantly shaming you for your sin. Those are powerful voices, yes. Influential and myriad. **Because they all want to be god.** They all want

to be in charge. They all want power over you.

But there's only one voice we're told to listen to: **God's only-begotten, beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased.** For only His voice will not deceive you or mislead you. Only His voice is pure truth. Only His voice can take away your fear. **Listen to Him.**

That's what Peter said in the Epistle we heard today. He said yes, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty - we were there! We saw the glory, the bright cloud, we heard the voice from heaven. But ***we have something more sure*** than all that, that we were told to listen to! ***The prophetic Word***, Peter says. The Word of God. The Scriptures. **For those aren't just words talking about Jesus, they are Jesus talking to us.** That is how we listen to Him today. I think we've lost that understanding. But we need to get it back. The understanding that while yes, the Scriptures were written by men, it is the Word of God. **Not just the word about God - but the Word of God.** That like Jesus, the Scriptures have both a divine and human nature: the very voice of God though written by men.

So, Peter goes on to say, ***you will do well to pay attention [to them] as to a lamp shining in a dark place.*** A lamp, a light of truth and grace, of comfort and peace, shining in a very tumultuous, confusing, dark, and evil world.

And when we listen to Him, to that voice, to the Scriptures, *what do we hear?*

We hear that the sins we are afraid of, that frighten us, Jesus has atoned for. He took them, and you can't have them back! *I forgive you all your sins.* They're gone. And so is their guilt and shame.

We hear that the death we are afraid of, that frightens us, Jesus has overcome death in His resurrection. The grave could not hold Him, and it will not be able to hold you either. On the Last Day He will say to you, ***rise!*** just as he did to the disciples on the mountain. They did, and so will you. But you, on that day, to a life that will not end, and to eat and drink with God - not on the top of Mt. Sinai, like Moses and his sons and the elders of Israel, but with all believers in Christ, in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end.

We hear also that Jesus has defeated the evil one. He resisted his temptations, cast him out of those he possessed, and stripped him of his power. Yes, he's still prowling around you, still hissing his lies into your ears. Don't listen to him or his surrogates, no matter how impressive they look or sound. Their words don't give you life, they only suck the life out of you.

And we hear Jesus say, *I am with you always* (Matthew 28:20). Neither time nor space can separate us from Jesus and His love. Or from His hand touching you in the water of Baptism, or His Body and Blood touching you in the bread and wine of the Supper. Baptism and the Supper aren't just things the Church does, but that Jesus does in His Church. For you are His and He is yours.

And speaking of the Church, that is another thing that is both divine and human. We look at the Church and see weakness, sin, failure, conflict. Church officials caught in sin. Her human nature can be quite ugly! And yet she is the Bride of Christ, a holy Church, His divine institution, washed clean by His blood, and beautiful and radiant in His eyes.

And thus baptized by Jesus, and fed by Him, and forgiven by Him, this then is also true - the voice of the Father *for you*: that YOU are His beloved son, with whom He is well pleased. And your perfect Father will never forsake His children.

That is the confidence we have as on Wednesday we enter the season of Lent, a season of repentance. Repentance and self-denial not to earn His grace and favor - you already have that in Jesus! No, we repent *in order* to hear His word of forgiveness. We deny our sinful urges *in order* to follow in His holy ways. And throughout this season we train ourselves to **listen to Him**. To grow in His Word and faith, and for His Word and faith to grow in us. That focused on Him and living in Him, our fear be taken away, replaced with His love and life.

That in this world of sin, confusion, doubt, shame, trouble, trial, sadness, tears, death, and fear . . . On our mountains of trouble, our valleys of despair, or our daily slog through life . . . In our families or at work or school . . . In the best of times and the worst of times . . . No matter where you are or who you are . . . **we lift up our eyes, and see Jesus only. And listen to Him.** And live each day in, with, and under Him.

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.