

## Written Copy: Matthew 17:2, 5-7 “The God Who Loves to Be with You”

Transfiguration Sunday

Sunday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### Text: Matthew 17:2, 5-7

<sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

<sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

### Exegetical Statement

Jesus chooses His inner circle of disciples to be eyewitnesses to Him revealing who He truly is as God and Man. He does so on a high mountain, just as the LORD revealed Himself to Moses and the Elders at Mt. Sinai. Jesus was transformed into a beautiful radiance that was His divine glory allowed to shine through His humanity. With Him are two Old Testament men of God who were welcomed into the LORD's presence on a mountain, and who represent how the Old Testament served to reveal and point to the Messiah. Peter misses the import of this when, instead of seeing and listening he blurts out an offer to build three huts, presumably so he can have an extended audience with each, placing Moses and Elijah on the same level as Jesus. But God the Father responds to this by manifesting His divine presence in a cloud and declaring Jesus to be His Beloved Son, who always pleases Him. Then He gives all the divine command to "Listen to Him!" This brings an exceedingly great fear over the disciples who fall prostrate. But Jesus in an act of love and mercy comes to them, touches them, bids them rise and stop being afraid. When they do the vision of His transformation and the presence of Elijah and Moses are gone. Jesus commands them not to tell of this vision until after He is raised from the dead, for it can only be properly seen and understood in light of the resurrection.

### Focus Statement:

Our God desires to be with us, His sinful people. He does so by coming to us cloaking His divine presence in the means of grace to protect us, through His real presence by the Spirit in His Word, and Christ's real presence in the Sacraments. He comes to call us to repentant faith in Him, and to live in that faith relationship with Him now, keeping us close to Him, so that we will enjoy eternity with Him in all His glory, where He will glorify us body and soul to live with Him forever.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We can wrongly see God as distant and judgmental and miss His desire to be present among us and prepare us for life with Him now and for eternity.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Praise and thank Him for His loving, forgiving, merciful presence with us, coming with all His divine power, to be with us now and forever. Through His loving presence be willing to live in peace with others, even those that are hard to be around.

### Subject Sentence: Our God loves to be with us now and forever

## **Introduction: How Does God See Our Sinfulness?**

You know that feeling; that feeling when you walk into a room and see that person, that one person you hoped wouldn't show up, yet you were afraid they might come. And now all your fears are realized. It's that sinking feeling in your stomach. And you brace yourself for what is about to come.

It's the person that just rubs you the wrong way. The voice that when you hear it reminds you of nails on a chalkboard. You know it's going to be an evening of listening to them brag about themselves and telling you about all things they are doing right, as well as what it is that you are doing, which is wrong.

It's that person who is like a bomb waiting to explode. They can seem to be in a pleasant enough mood, but suddenly, without warning, they explode like a hurricane. Even if their anger and resentment is not directed at you specifically, it's still uncomfortable to be in the same room with them. They are the kind of person who is looking to start an argument with someone, and you're afraid it might be with you. They have no problem bringing up politics or religion. They do so not in order to discuss, but simply to prove they are right and you are wrong.

Perhaps you have a particular person in mind. But what if that person is, at times, you?

Did you ever stop and consider how our holy God sees you and me? Our God cannot tolerate sin, and we confessed at the beginning of our worship who we truly are in the presence of the Holy God: poor miserable sinners. How badly does our lack of love and patience for one another aggravate our Heavenly Father, who commands us to love and care for one another, even those people we cannot stand, even those who we consider have wronged us, even those we consider to be our enemies?

He is the God who sees, hears, and knows everything we say, do, and think. And most of it offends Him. Our God would have every reason to not want to be around us, not to want to be with us, but instead be distant from us, separate Himself from us now and forever.

Amazingly our God desires the opposite. He wants to be with His sinful people. Not because we are sinful; He hates our sin. But because He loves you, and me, and all that He created so very much.

### **Old Testament Lesson: He Desired to Be with His Sinful People**

This is what God reveals to us in our Old Testament Lesson. The LORD had come and with a mighty hand saved the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. They repaid Him by whining and complaining every chance they got, even accusing Him of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them in the wilderness by starvation.

But instead of abandoning them, or destroying them, He calls them into a Covenant relationship with Him. He claims them as His people and He as their God. He gives them the laws and rules that are His will and plan for how they should live as His chosen people. Then through the blood of the sacrificial offerings, offerings of animals given in place of them to forgive their sins, He officially draws them into the Covenant relationship with Him. He forgives them. They agree to obey as His forgiven children and live by His will and command.

Then He invites Moses, Aaron and his sons-whom He will choose to be priests to minister to the people on behalf of Him, and 70 elders which represent the nation of Israel, to come up on the mountain to worship and have fellowship with Him!

**Exodus 24:10-11** <sup>10</sup> They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made out of sapphire as clear and blue as the sky itself. <sup>11</sup> God didn't harm these leaders of the Israelites. So they saw God, and then they ate and drank. *(God's Word Translation)*

Now, even though He desires to be with His sinful people, there is a problem. Even though they've been forgiven, they are still sinful. Sinful man cannot be in the presence of God's holy, sinless presence and live; not unless God manifests Himself in a way that is safe for them. So, he allows them to come up, but they must remain at a distance. What exactly do they see? Not God's face, and there is really no mention of His form. The vision focuses on what lay beneath His feet: a dazzling expanse of clear blue sapphire, that represents the reign and rule of God over all things, with heaven and earth at His feet.

And what does this God who rules over all want with these sinful Israelites? To have them worship Him, and for Him to enjoy a fellowship meal with them. Keep in mind, in that culture, no one shares a meal with His enemies. This is a declaration by the God of the universe that there is peace between them and Him. He loves them and forgives them.

He then calls Moses, His chosen prophet and leader of these people, to come up the mountain further into His real presence, His power and glory cloaked in the luminous cloud that to those down below resembles a consuming fire. There in His presence, this loving God gives to Moses to give to His people commands and instructions as to how to live in an obedient faith relationship with Him.

## **Gospel Lesson: God who desires to Be with His Sinful People**

Our Gospel Lesson shows us the same God who still desires to be among His sinful people. The disciples of Jesus day were still just as sinful as their forefathers. Therefore, the same problem exists, sinful man cannot be in the presence of the Holy God without separation, distance, and protection from His holiness. But our God desires not just to be among His people, but to have an intimate relationship with them.

The Holy God arranged for this very thing through the miracle of the incarnation. God the Son came down and was intimately joined with humanity in the person that is Jesus of Nazareth. 100 % man and at the same time 100 % God.

**Matthew 17:2-3 <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.**

In the Transfiguration Jesus is showing His disciples and us just a peek into the divine glory, power, and majesty that belongs to God the Son incarnate. Out of love Jesus controls how much they get to see, enough to blow them away so that they babble about building shelters for two dead guys, but not enough to destroy them.

Of course, Peter doesn't quite get it. Instead of focusing on Jesus, instead of watching and listening, he tries to assert himself into what is going on. Kind of like that person at the party that you want to avoid. But God the Father comes to focus Peter's attention, as well as ours, back where it belongs.

**Matthew 17:5 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."**

Here is God the Father, making an appearance just as He had in the Old Testament, cloaking Himself in a bright luminous cloud that shielded their eyes from a full blast of His glory while enveloping them, bringing them into the same intimate contact that Moses had on the mountain.

The Father turns their attention back to the Son. This Jesus, shining out before them, is God the Son, beloved of the Father, whom in what He says, does, and thinks always pleases Him. What He says and what He does is the complete truth. God is saying "Stop trying to make Him to be the Messiah that you want Him to be. Look and listen to the Messiah I have sent Him to be".

## **Jesus Christ: God Who Desires an Intimate Relationship w/You**

God the Father sent God the Son to clear the way for all people to have an intimate relationship with Him. Jesus came to remove the separation caused by our continued sinfulness. He came to cancel all those sinful thoughts, words, and actions that make us unworthy of being in God's presence now and forever.

Jesus is God who became man in order to take from us all that sinfulness and atone for it by sacrificing Himself upon the cross. Everything that you do, say, and think that would give God cause to destroy you, or banish you from His presence forever has been atoned for.

And in your baptism Jesus gives to you His perfect life, that life that made the Father testify that He is well pleased. You are given that to wear as the white robe of righteousness. By baptismal faith you are awarded right standing with the Father and given all that Jesus earned for you during His life upon the earth: worthy of an intimate relationship with God now that never ends.

Jesus was God coming down to live, walk, eat, teach, laugh, and save sinful men and women. He came to have an intimate relationship with them by cloaking His power and glory in humanity. And He rose again so that you could know for certain that this relationship doesn't end with death, it will continue on all the way to eternal life to come.

## **The God Who Out of Love Comes to Be with us forever**

Even though Jesus has ascended back to the Father from where He came, He has not left us or abandoned us. He is the God revealed in Psalm 2 who continues to rule over all things. Who is in charge and whose will is always done even when evil men set themselves against His will and plan. He rules over all things for your good, even and especially when it doesn't look like He is.

And He still comes to be with you and me. He came to you in your baptism through the presence of the Holy Spirit who came upon you, never to leave you. He comes to you through His Word read, preached, and sung. He comes to you to remind you of who you are without Him: a poor miserable sinner. He comes to remind you of who you are in faith toward Him, a poor miserable sinner who has been forgiven, and is being restored to God by your faith relationship with Him.

He comes to strengthen and grow that faith relationship through His presence in the Lord's Supper. Here at the rail, as you receive His body cloaked in bread, and His blood cloaked in wine, He is really and truly present. He is present with all the power and authority to forgive your sins and draw you closer to Him.

He comes to keep you in that saving faith relationship as you live out your life here on this earth, in the midst of all the temptations that work upon our sinful heart, all the temptations the devil would use to draw you away from Him. He comes with His divine power and presence to keep you in steadfast faith unto life everlasting. He comes to abide with you now and the way to that day when He will return in all His glory. Then you and I will be able to stand in His presence and see that glory, no longer cloaked, but shining out full blast. We will stand and live in His presence forever because He will glorify and purify our bodies and souls so that we can.

## Conclusion

Why on earth would the Holy God go to such great lengths for you and I, who let Him down daily, disobey Him daily, show ourselves to be unworthy daily? Simply because He loves you so very much. He loves you so much he wants a faith relationship with you, one that is living and active every day of your life. One where you turn to Him for forgiveness, love, and obedience. One where you begin to shine out His love to those around you; even to those who make you grit your teeth like hearing nails on a chalk board, those who annoy you, are argumentative with you, and are sometimes not nice to you. He wants us to realize that we are sometimes that person who is hard to be with, hard to love. Through His power and presence, He is at work leading us to love and forgive others by that same power, that same presence, that same love by which we are forgiven by. May that work continue in your life and my life. Amen.