

Written Copy: Matthew 17:5-9 “Your Eternal Transformation”

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Sunday, February 19th, 2023

Text: Matthew 17:5-9

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." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Exegetical Statement

Peter has correctly identified Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, who is in actuality the Son of the Living God. Jesus then describes what that means, how this anointed King would assume His rightful position reigning and ruling in the kingdom He comes to bring, and that is not by sitting on a throne in Jerusalem but by being affixed to the throne of the cross and ruling over (defeating) our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil through His death and resurrection. And so that we might see His suffering, death, and resurrection in the correct context Jesus reveals the divinity that lies cloaked by His humanity. As God the Father personally testifies, He is the Divine Son of God, of whom the Law and the Prophets testify to. He is the perfectly obedient Son of whom the Father is well-pleased. Peter, who struggled at the first announcement that Jesus' passion must happen, breaks in during the conversation between Elijah, Moses, and Jesus to assert what he feels would be well and good: shelters for private confab with each of these figures. But the Father breaks in to straighten them and us out, we are to "Listen to Him". His Gospel Message, which He is about to communicate through word and action is the testimony that is needed if we are to join Jesus in our transfiguration on the Last Day when we will shine with the same glory that belongs to Him, made perfect in the resurrection.

Focus Statement:

In His transfiguration Jesus was revealed to His disciples and to us just who it was that would be made to suffer and die in Jerusalem, not any ordinary man, but God the Son in human flesh. He had come to establish His reign and rule but would do so by ascending to the throne that was the cross where He would reign by defeating our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He would earn for us the right to our own complete transformation into our glorious eternal resurrected bodies.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Just like the disciples, we fail to see the need for suffering, persecution, and temptation on our road to glory. Given the transforming reign and rule of Christ in our hearts, we expect that transformation to be evident in our lives lived in the world. Yet at times they look more like defeat instead of victory.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Through the Word and Sacrament pay attention to Jesus speaking to us, drawing us close to Him in the Sacrament that is the foretaste of the glorious transformation to come in eternal life.

Subject Sentence: Our glorious transformation thru suffering with Christ

Introduction: Our Desire for Transformation

Who among us doesn't dream of some kind of transformation? This has been a popular premise in the world of reality TV Shows, especially when it comes to transforming your home. It all began with the PBS Show "This Old House" 1979 originally hosted by Bob Vila as a kind of how to do it show on renovating vintage homes. Then there came along "Extreme Home Makeover" in 2003 starring Ty Pennington, They specialized in renovating homes for families that had fallen on hard times, That was the show famous for the line "Move that Bus" where the audience, after seeing a before picture of the dilapidated home they started with, would move the bus out of the way and show the completely renovated home inside and out, as well as the family's joyful reactions. And nowadays, this genre is still going strong with shows like The Property Brothers: two identical twins who help couples find and renovate extreme fixer uppers into their dream homes.

But homes aren't the only thing that we dream of transforming. There are those seek to transform their bodies by exercise, diet, and even plastic surgery. And there are those who have gone beyond cosmetic transformation. There are those who have sought to change their identity. There was the man born with the unlikely name of Issur Danielovitch Densky who became the famous actor "Kirk Douglas". A young lady born with the name Frances Ethel Gumm transformed herself and her image into Judy Garland. One Archibald Leach became Cary Grant. And do you think anyone would've paid money to see a movie hero named Marion Morrison? But they certainly did when he changed his name to John Wayne.

While you may not have dreams of transforming your home, or your identity in hopes of becoming a famous movie actor or actress, we all at times dream of transforming our lives, especially when they become full of pain and suffering. After all, since we've been baptized into Jesus' family as God's precious children shouldn't our lives be different from the rest of the unbelieving world. If Jesus is reigning and ruling at the right hand of the Father, can't He work to prevent some of the troubles we face; or at least lessen them? **2 Corinthians 5:17** **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.** Yet our lives as a new creation lived out in faith seem to be filled with the same problems and struggles and temptations as those without faith. Perhaps we, like the disciples, need to transform our view of what life should be like as Jesus' disciple.

The Transfiguration the Disciples Needed to See

The disciples were struggling with what it means to follow Jesus. In the previous chapter we see Peter's great confession of who Jesus is: The Christ (the promised anointed One who had come to save His people), the Son of the Living God. Jesus affirms this truth, but then begins discussing what this means right now: heading to Jerusalem where He will suffer at the hands of the religious authorities, be put to death, and rise again. Peter is not ready to get on board with this plan and tells Jesus He must have it wrong. But Jesus reprimands Peter, telling him he is not speaking according to God but for Satan. Then Jesus goes further by telling them all that those who wish to be His disciples need to be prepared to deny themselves, take up their own cross-accepting whatever suffering may come because of their faith, and follow Him. This was not the transformed life the disciples expected. They thought His reign and rule as the Christ would and should be different.

They needed a reset on how they should view Him and life in His kingdom. They needed to see just who this "Christ, the Son of the Living God really is. So Jesus took His inner core group of disciples: Peter, James, and John with Him up on a high mountain for the mountain top of mountain top experiences. And there they got to see the truth of who Jesus really is. He was transfigured before their eyes: transformed into something greater and more beautiful. The cause of this transformation was the revelation of the divine nature that coexisted alongside His human nature. They got to peek at the Divine glory, power, and holy beauty that always belonged to Jesus as the Son of God but was cloaked under His humanity.

In and of itself this was mind-blowing for these three disciples. But on top of this there was Jesus standing and speaking with two revered figures from the past that had been long dead: Moses and Elijah. Each of them were known for having their own personal mountain top experience with the real presence of God manifested before them, yet cloaked for their protection. And here they are once again in the presence of God Himself cloaked in humanity, revealing just a tad of the glory that belonged to Jesus as the Son of God.

The transfiguration was not for Jesus' benefit; He knew who He was, as did Moses and Elijah. This was for the disciples' benefit and understanding. It was a time to stop and contemplate something that was beyond fully taking in with just a glance. Perhaps they all would've been better served just listening to all Jesus had to discuss with these two figures. But impetuous Peter can't hold his tongue and blurts out his infamous line: **Matthew 17:4** **And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."** As Scripture tells us Peter doesn't really know what he is saying. But he is expressing the desire to make this moment last for as long as possible. He wants to build three temporary shelters so that he can have personal face to face time with Moses and Elijah, and maybe Jesus too afterwards. He wants to get the inside scoop from these two great religious leaders of the past.

But God the Father steps in and re-directs Peter's and the other disciples' attention to what is most important: not Moses and Elijah, but Jesus Himself. Manifesting His real presence cloaked in a cloud, as the LORD had done many times in the Old Testament, God the Father gives them what this vision should mean-what they should take home from this: **Matthew 17:5** *He (Peter) 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."* God the Father is saying, *"This man you call Jesus: this is My Beloved Son, the Divine Son of God begotten from Me from eternity past, existing alongside me from forever to forever. This is God the Son who was there at the beginning and through whom all things came into creation, who along with me has been the force that keeps the world spinning, the plants growing, and all life continuing on this globe. This is the one and only human being in whom I am well-pleased by all He does and says and thinks, because He is perfectly obedient. In fact, what He has been telling you about His upcoming arrest, suffering, dying, and rising is all the truth directly from My will and plan. It is what I, God the Father, have deemed must happen. Therefore, listen to Him, and believe what He says. Believe in what He does. Believe in Him.*

Confronted with all this: Jesus transfiguration topped off with God the Father speaking to them from the cloud is more than these disciples (or you and I if we had been there) could handle. **Matthew 17:6** *When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.* But Jesus purpose was not to scare them. **Matthew 17:7** *But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear.* He tells them to stop being afraid and get back up. But this is not said in any manner other than love, as we can see from Jesus' loving action of reaching out and touching them.

Why They and We Needed to See the Transfiguration

So why did His disciples need to witness this? Why is it we regularly need to observe this as an important feast day? Jesus gives us a clue with His order given to the disciples after it was over, **Matthew 17:9** *And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.* Now you might wonder, why not tell at least the other disciples, if not the crowd that had been following Jesus, just what had happened and who this man Jesus really is. But Jesus knows that His transfiguration can only be correctly understood in light of His suffering, death, and resurrection. That's how they would need to see it correctly, as well as how we should see it here today.

If the crowd that had been following Jesus would've witness His transfiguration, they would've been more than ready to crown Him their earthly king in Jerusalem with the goal of re-establishing the kingdom of Israel as it had been in the days of King David, and make it even more glorious. They would call on Him to use His divine power emanating forth to rid them of all their enemies and make their lives like heaven on earth. Trouble is their lives would only be glorious for as long as they lasted, for 70 years or so, maybe even less, until they met their end in death. And then their eternal future would be one of torment as they paid the price for all their sinful disobedience. Jesus came not to establish heaven on earth, but to open the way for all people to enjoy the paradise that is eternal life to come.

They, as well as we, need to see this transfigured Jesus as the same one who was purposefully heading to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and thereby begin to understand the unfathomable love that is being poured out in this act. That God Himself would come down and become one of us, live amongst the dirt and poverty, and brokenness of our earthly existence, and do so out of love for you. That He would allow Himself to be tempted in all the ways we are yet remain obedient to God's commands in your place. That God Himself by taking on your humanity would willingly suffer what He otherwise never could as the immortal invincible God, death, your death, with the end goal of removing your sin, guilt, and shame forever, so that none of it would ever be held against you. This Jesus who was heading to Jerusalem to suffer die, and rise was the Creator God restoring His perfection to fallen humanity out of the greatest love ever known, His love for us, His love for you.

The transfiguration not only helps us see and understand this love that is Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, it but also foreshadows what awaits us on the Last Day. On that day when Jesus returns, He will raise from the grave your body that you live in right now, and will one day die in. Your body will be raised and transformed to be like His glorious body. It will be perfect in every way with none of the pains, sickness, illnesses, weaknesses that you suffer now. It will be the image of perfection as God originally created Adam and Eve to be. As Jesus Himself says in **Matthew 13:43** **Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.** You will shine with the glory that belongs to Jesus Himself, given to you, body and soul. for all eternity. What a glorious transformation that will be!

The On-going Transformation Process

But we don't have to wait for the Last Day to experience this wonderful transformation. It is going on inside you right now. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine. He is changing our hearts and our minds to become more like our Savior's. He does this as we realize the enormity of our sin, and then realize the enormity of the grace, forgiveness, and the love we have through our faith in Him. He does this even as we suffer all the trials and problems that are our life on earth. He does this not by removing them, but instead walking with us through them. It happens as we participate in the means of grace that are poured out here in Divine Worship. It happens especially when we participate in that unique mountain top experience that is the Lord's Supper, when we are invited into Jesus very presence located in the bread and the wine, where we take Him physically into our body and He joins with us, drawing us ever closer to Him.

Conclusion

It would be nice to totally transform our house into a beautiful mansion. But then again, when we die, we leave that mansion behind. And it will be totally destroyed on the Last Day. We can change our bodies through various means, or even change our names, but we are still the person God created us to be. Jesus disciples thought that His reign and rule on earth meant all their problems should go away. Instead, He shows Himself to be the Divine Son of God who became man in order to suffer and die for us, not to make heaven on earth now, but to make you and I good enough for the endless perfection of eternal life where we will live transformed into His glory. In the meantime, He walks with us, helping us carry that cross that is our suffering, pain, and temptation, leading us all the way to that final transformation in life everlasting. Amen.