

Luke 9:28-36
Transfiguration Sunday
February 27, 2022

"It's good to be here." I hope you would say that about attending worship this morning. You have probably voiced those sentiments about other treasured spots. It could be coming home after driving through dangerous conditions on the roads or after stressful days at work or school. Perhaps you have reveled in a favorite vacation place, whether it was a remote and quiet area for relaxation or a bustling, busy scene of enjoyed activity. Witnessing an exciting championship victory of a favorite team or outstanding musical or dramatic performances can elicit similar emotions, whether it is at the professional level or involving your children or grandchildren.

"It's good to be here," were Peter's blurted words at today's scene on the mount of transfiguration. He was reacting without thinking, as he often did, but his words ring true. The experience imparts valuable truths. We echo his statement.

IT'S GOOD TO BE HERE

- I. With our glorious Lord
- II. With his message of salvation

These were important days for Jesus and the Twelve. On a recent day he had quizzed his trainees about how the public viewed him. Then he directed the personal question to them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter had answered for them, correctly and decisively, "The Christ of God." Jesus praised that confession as the foundation of his Church.

To their surprise he then followed with an announcement of his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. They were saddened by the suffering and dying part and apparently missed the news about his rising from the dead. He invited them to take up the cross and follow him. There was also mention of his return in glory for the final judgment. Heavy topics, with serious and lasting impact.

It was a good time for prayer. Jesus went up a mountain—which one is debated, and finally, the location is not all that important, but what happened there is the key. He went to spend time in communication with his heavenly Father, a regular activity during his earthly walk. It was also part of his preparation for the events ahead. Peter, James and John, the three disciples with whom he was closest, went with him.

That's when it happened. "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." His appearance was altered. That's where we get the term "transfiguration" from. It means a change of form, becoming different. Especially involved was brightness. Jesus was glowing with such light that even his clothing became strikingly bright.

What brought about this event was that his divine nature was showing through his human appearance. He always had that heavenly glory but usually kept it veiled during his ministry here. A few glimpses came. When he performed miracles, his divine power was at work. His infinite knowledge was clear when he knew thoughts of people even when they had not voiced them aloud. Here was visible, physical proof that Jesus was no ordinary person but was the true Son of God.

Another astounding feature was that others showed up on the mountain. Moses was one of them. As you will recall, he was the leader of Israel when they left Egypt and through their forty years of wilderness wandering. He was the one who met God on Mt. Sinai and received the stone tablets of the Law. He had not entered the Promised Land with the nation, but died just across the river on Mt. Nebo, where the Bible reports that God buried him. The other individual present was Elijah, a prophet of God. He was a stern preacher of God's Law when the nation of Israel was in decline. He met mistreatment for his faithful testimony. He did not die, but was taken by God directly to heaven in a whirlwind, accompanied by a chariot and horses of fire.

These two men, also glorious in appearance, carried on a conversation with Jesus. "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." They talked about the same matter Jesus had recently spoken of: his suffering and death. Surely they conversed not just about the events but also of what he would accomplish with his death. The presence of Moses and Elijah here demonstrated the unity of the Old and New Testaments and how the law and prophets concurred in the work of the Savior. As God's spokesmen they had foretold what he would do and how it would happen. Now it was about to take place.

The wonder of it all produced a reaction from Peter. In his exuberance, he wanted to preserve the moment. Can't argue with that, right? He had experienced nothing like this before. Perhaps the closest feeling he could think of was the festal spirit during the Feast of Tabernacles. That autumn harvest festival commemorated the wilderness journey of Israel. The worshipers lived in booths that they set up outside their homes, remembering the temporary dwellings of their forefathers.

Like our holidays, it was a time of joy. In his befuddled mindset Peter suggested building shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Why did he suggest the glorified beings needed protection but not himself and his companions James and John, I have no idea. God's plans, however, did not call for heaven to come and stay here on this sinful earth. He would rescue us from sin through his Son. So it was not time for Jesus to continue in a glorious mode. He would go through the depths of humiliation as he and his heavenly visitors had been discussing.

What was God showing? The transfiguration demonstrated that Jesus is true God, as he has been from all eternity. This Jesus who would go through that horrible suffering would do so as God the Son. Thus he would be victorious. He would succeed. He would win the victory that enabled Moses and Elijah to be with him in heaven, for Peter, James and John to go there, and for you and me to do so also. That same divine, glorious, victorious and powerful Savior stands at your side, not just on a distant mountain, but in every moment of every day, wherever you are, in good times and in bad times. You can always say, "It is good to be here, because you are at my side."

II.

Our joy results from more of what happened on the mount. It is good to be here with our glorious Lord and with his message of salvation. When all that we already noted was happening, a cloud suddenly surrounded the group. This cloud was not a dark one bringing a storm. Matthew's account of the event identifies it as a bright cloud, like all the other special features of the day. We might also think of the cloud that filled the Temple in Jerusalem at its dedication, that happening called "the glory of the Lord," indicating God's presence with his people and the fact that he was taking action for them. From this cloud a voice spoke. "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." He had selected Jesus for this mission, a most important one that we might term "mission impossible." He came to rescue the world from sin. Sin permeates every single one of us who inhabit this planet. It corrupts our thought process; it fills our words and actions. We were born in that state of separation from God and rebellion against him. Our sinful condition shows in the way we fail to listen to him. We elevate our own ideas above his commands and revealed truth, as if to say, "God, you take a hike. I'm smarter than you are. I'm taking charge of my life." Sin also stands out in the way we treat the people God has placed around us in our family, our neighborhood, our school or workplace, our congregation. We are selfish and inconsiderate toward others. As each of us individually lives in sin twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the load of the world's sins is enormous. That's what Jesus was sent to remove. It was a monumental task, but one for which he was perfectly suited as true God and true

man in one being. He was the substitute for the entire human race in living and in dying.

We learn here that his work met the Father's approval as he said, "Listen to him." He has something worth saying. He is a prophet, as Moses had described him when he foretold of Christ's coming and the instruction he would provide. He is the Word made flesh that John wrote about at the beginning of his Gospel, God in person, revealing the Father and his love. He is the center of the written Scriptures. Jesus pointed out, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me." The Old Testament predicted his coming and work. The New Testament presents the fulfillment in his perfect life and his painful suffering and death on the cross as the payment for your sins and mine.

"Listen to him." The Father's instruction speaks to us. The message of Jesus, his Word, is where we gain assurance for our daily life. That's where we learn of his work for our salvation, the peace of forgiveness he brought us, and our home in heaven. God's love comes to us in the Word and in the sacraments, but the Word is the key. God's Word gives power to baptism to plant faith and wash away sins. That Word places Jesus' true body and blood in Holy Communion, bringing forgiveness of sins. It is the Word of Jesus that gives strength, direction and hope as we travel through the doldrums and troubles of life. That's why we can always say, even in those times, "It's good to be here."

So listen to him. Hear and ponder his Word, grasp it with firm faith. Health experts affirm the benefit of meditation. Why not do your meditating on Jesus and his message of forgiveness for all your sins, of his gift of eternal life in heaven? Think of his impact on your life. Wherever the Word is used we can truly say, "It's good to be here!"

The upcoming weeks of Lent provide special opportunity to review and to cherish the path Jesus walked as he offered himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Our midweek services remind us of our guilt which caused his painful suffering and move us to repentance. We lament our role. But having gone up the mount of transfiguration with him today, like the trio of disciples, we know that he is the glorious Son of God who has won the victory for us. We know it was God's plan and that it succeeded. You and I listen to his Word with devotion and joy. "It's good to be here."