

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 17:1-9: “The Son of Man Is Risen and Reigns.”
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In Nomine Iesu

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O Almighty and everlasting God, whose blessed Son revealed Himself to His chosen Apostles when He was transfigured on the holy mount, and amidst the excellent glory spoke with Moses and Elijah of His departure which He should accomplish at Jerusalem: Grant to us Your servants, that, beholding the brightness of His countenance, we may be strengthened to bear the cross, and be changed into His likeness from glory to glory; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colqhoun, p. 137)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. / 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.” / 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.” / When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. / 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.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the bright Morning Star, whose light of grace shines into our hearts through His holy Word, dear fellow redeemed:

If Peter, James, and John had doubts before this, now they were sure. Jesus was the Son of God. They saw Him transfigured before them – His face shining like the sun, His clothes as white as light. They saw Moses and Elijah talking with him, arguably the two most prominent figures from Old Testament times. They were enveloped by the cloud and heard the Voice: “*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.*” They believed that Jesus was God in the flesh.

But immediately after this experience, Jesus said something troubling: “*Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.*” The secrecy part wasn’t so bad; it was that Jesus was saying He would die. It wasn’t the first time He had said this. Shortly before His transfiguration, Jesus told the disciples that He would be killed and then raised. Bold Peter pulled Him aside to give him a talking to: “*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you*” (Mat. 16:22). Then Jesus

rebuked him, calling him “Satan” and “a hindrance,” and told him he was setting his mind on the things of man.

After His transfiguration, Jesus spoke of His death again: *“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day”* (Mat. 17:22-23). Matthew, one of the Twelve, records the fact that these words caused the disciples *“great distress.”* It didn’t make sense. How could Jesus who had power over demons, sickness, and death, and who revealed His eternal glory, end up dead. They were convinced He was God. How could God die?

Each time Jesus predicted His death, He also predicted His resurrection, but that part did not sink in. The disciples took Jesus seriously when He said He would die, but perhaps they doubted He could rise again if He were killed. No one had ever done something like that before. It isn’t that they denied the resurrection of the dead at the end of time on the last day. They just didn’t grasp how Jesus could rise on the third day after His death, or why this would even be necessary.

No doubt Peter, James, and John wanted to see more glory like they had on the mountaintop. Why couldn’t Jesus go to Jerusalem like that, with His face shining like the sun, flanked by Moses and Elijah? Instead, they saw Jesus enter Jerusalem humbly and give Himself into the hands of His enemies. They wanted to see glory but saw suffering. They wanted Jesus on the throne but instead saw Him on the cross. Jesus did not deliver like they wanted, but He did deliver how they needed.

The reason Jesus gave the three disciples a glimpse of His glory was to prepare them for the suffering to come. It was also to give them proofs along the way of who He was, so they could look back after His resurrection and ascension and understand why He did what He did and what He accomplished. This is why Jesus told them to keep the transfiguration to themselves *“until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”* After His resurrection, this would be one piece of evidence they could share that showed Jesus was both Son of Man and Son of God.

That same evidence is now set before us by the inspired Word of the apostles. We get to travel with the disciples to that mountaintop and learn what transpired, what they saw and heard. We see in Moses and Elijah the Old Testament Law and Prophets pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promise. The evangelist Luke reports that they were speaking to Jesus *“of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”* (Luk. 9:31). This is what Moses and Elijah had looked forward to so long before. The Messiah had come!

They had to wait a long time for the fulfillment of God’s promise, just as the New Testament Church has been waiting a long time for His return. In this time of waiting, it is easy to forget that Jesus is with us, and that He reigns over all things in heaven and on earth. We think that if this is so, we should have a lot more mountaintop experiences and not so much suffering. Why doesn’t Jesus show His glory and power to us? Why doesn’t He guard and protect us, so that suffering and death do not come our way?

But what was the disciples’ problem? They were going by their own expectation and their own experience while ignoring what Jesus said. The same is true for us when we expect Jesus to do for us what He has not promised to do. He has not promised visible appearances in power and

shining displays of His glory. He has promised His presence through Word and Sacrament. “*Take, eat; this is My body,*” He says. “*Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood*” (Mat. 26:26,27). Shortly before His ascension, He told the disciples what He would do with His authority as the Son of Man who had conquered sin, death, and devil. He said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*” (Mat. 28:19-20).

Did Jesus do what He said when He predicted His death and His resurrection on the third day? Absolutely. Has Jesus done what He said when He commissioned His Church to make disciples for Him of all nations by His baptism and teaching? If we shake our heads at the disciples for not believing Jesus’ promise to rise from the dead, we should admit that we have not always seen Jesus at work where He promised to be.

We were looking for glorious signs, visible displays of His might, while He was powerfully working in our congregations, our homes, and our hearts through His holy Word. The fact that there is a Christian Church all around the world in peaceful places like ours and in places of persecution in other countries shows that Jesus is working. People every day are baptized into His name and forgiven in His name. Every day, they partake of His holy body and blood. Every day, believers are translated from this world of trouble to His kingdom of glory.

Jesus is doing exactly what He said He would do for you and me. He carries our burdens and gives us rest. He forgives our sins and strengthens our faith. He comforts us in difficulties and gives us courage to confess the truth. He prepares us to enter the eternal mansions that He won for us by His death and resurrection. We might want perfect health, great prosperity, world peace. But He gives us what we truly need. And all the troubles, suffering, and hardship that we experience here, He works through and turns around for our good.

We see an example of His powerful work in the life of Paul who was originally called Saul. His conversion is remembered each year on January 25. Saul thought that Jesus was a false teacher. He thought that movement would end with Jesus’ death. But instead, the movement had gained traction and momentum with Jesus’ disciples claiming that He had risen from the dead! Saul wanted to put a stop to it. When the first Christian, Stephen, was stoned to death after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Saul was there watching in approval (Act. 7:58).

Stephen’s martyrdom was the beginning of a great persecution against the rapidly growing Christian Church. Saul was one of the ringleaders. We are told that he “*was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison*” (8:3). He was on the way to do this in Damascus when a great light from heaven shone around him, like the light that came from Jesus at His transfiguration. And on this occasion, too, a Voice spoke from heaven. But it was not the Voice of the Father; it was the Voice of the Son, saying, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” (9:4). “*Who are you, Lord?*” asked Saul. And the Voice said, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*” (v. 5).

Talk about a shock! Saul thought Jesus was dead and therefore could not have been God. Now he realized Jesus was exactly who He had said, and that He had risen from the dead and was reigning in heaven. If Saul had not become convinced that the Son of Man was also the Son of

God, he would not have undertaken his three missionary journeys and taken such abuse for preaching Christ.

So Paul testifies to the truth of who Jesus is, just as Peter, James, and John and the other apostles did. You have their testimony recorded in the New Testament. When God the Father spoke from heaven, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him"*—the way you listen to Him is by reading, hearing, and meditating upon His holy Word. When like the three disciples, you cower in fear with the awareness of your sin, He touches you through His Sacraments and bids you to *"rise, and have no fear."* You lift up your eyes and see no one but Him—*"Jesus only."* Only He is your righteousness, forgiveness, and peace; only He is your salvation; only He is your life.

Jesus told Peter, James, and John, *"Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."* The fact that you are hearing about this vision from the New Testament writings means that *"the Son of Man is raised from the dead."* He is God incarnate, God in the flesh, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man born of the virgin Mary. He died on the cross, and then conquered death by rising on the third day. **This Son of Man Is Risen and Reigns.** He has kept His promise to you and to the whole Church. He does not fail to visit you here through the Means of Grace, by which He continues to fortify and strengthen all believers.

And He will come again in glory on the last day, when you will get to see Him as the three disciples did, with Moses, Elijah, and all the saints surrounding Him. Then you will behold Him without fear and will join Him in His bright presence, whose kingdom shall have no end.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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