

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – 2024

2 Kings 2:1-12

2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:1-6

Mark 9:2-9

I was invited to a Redlands clergy luncheon the other day. The invitation was plus 1 so I enticed my beloved bride to accompany me on the social outing. I'd never been to one of these events and so I didn't know quite what to expect. Alise and I walked through the door of the gathering and I figured that it would be best to introduce us to whoever we came across first. "Hi, my name is Wiley James Smith and I'm the pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church and this is my wife." The gentleman to whom I was speaking interrupted the introduction. He had a glazed look on his face and said: "Don't you mean that this *represents* your wife?" I repeated: "This *is* my wife." Again, he said, "don't you mean that this *symbolizes* your wife?" This *is* my wife. What part of "is" don't you understand?

By offering this fabricated story, I'm not trying to be contentious. I am not trying to say that Lutherans are better than any other sinners for we most assuredly are not. I *am* trying to say that there is a difference and that each of you needs to be aware of *why* there is a difference. St. Paul wrote these words: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). This is not our religion. This is not our Word. This is God's truth, God's religion, God's church. God's Word is not our plaything. It's not our calling to use our sophisticated mind to make God's revelation dance to our tune. We don't mold the church or Christian doctrine into something that we design. God's Word and Christ's church is to form us, not vice-versa. The culture around us is not to leaven the church. Christ's church is to leaven the culture around us. Here's the same verse from another version: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (ESV). Jesus said that the bread of the Eucharist is His body and that's precisely what it is.

Christ is transfigured. His glory shines through His person, through and in His humanity. God and man in one person; this radiant figure on the mountain is truly who the Lord Christ is. A bright cloud overshadowed those on the mountain and the voice of the Father is heard: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mark 9:7). Don't talk, Peter. Listen to Him. Peter is the Rosetta Stone to this event. Immediately prior to the Transfiguration in Mark's gospel, Jesus had asked His disciples what they were hearing on the street. The Lord didn't ask this question because He needed the information. He's teaching them, leading them to see the truth, leading them to confess the truth. "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27). The disciples responded with the confusion, the pop theology that had gripped people's imaginations. Then Jesus hones in on the twelve. "But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). Peter speaks the words that inhabit your heart. Peter speaks the words that inhabit your mind: "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29). Glorious! Peter lays hold of something that is hidden and yet divinely revealed. You are the Christ. Only faith can speak that word (1 Corinthians 12:3). You are the Christ. Only the eyes of the heart can see what Peter saw (Ephesians 1:18).

Then Jesus got busy telling the disciples what it meant to be the Christ. I am going to suffer. I am going to be rejected. I am going to be killed. I am going to rise. “And he said this plainly” (Mark 8:32). Something snapped in Peter. Peter lost it. Peter presumed to rebuke the Lord of all Creation. Peter presumed to tell God’s Son what God’s Son’s business was, or more accurately, what God’s business wasn’t. Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you! (Matthew 16:22). Jesus unleashed His own rebuke: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Mark 8:33). Yep; I’m guilty of that. My trust in God’s promises wavers. Yours does too. “Thy will be done” may be on your lips but it’s not always in your actions. How many of you attempt to wrest control of your life away from God and all to yourself? Contrary to the bumper sticker, God is not a co-pilot. We take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. I get accused of being too black and white. Well, you tell me; is there any gray in that verse?

Jesus said that His life would be our life. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). This next bit is a verse for our time. At the end of this episode, after Peter’s foolhardy remarks, Jesus said this: “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). We preach Christ crucified and we are not ashamed. We say that the Bible is God’s holy and inspired and inerrant Word and we are not ashamed. We say “is” means “is” and we are not ashamed. It’s not our Word. It’s not our religion. It’s not our church. It’s Christ’s Word, Christ’s Church, Christ’s Kingdom, Christ’s Salvation, Christ’s Empty Tomb, Christ’s Heaven, Christ’s Baptism and Christ’s Supper.

Mark tells us that “after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves” (Mark 9:2). “After six days” is a literary device to connect what had happened previously with what is about to unfold. After six days is also intended to draw to mind Creation – how God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Now, in the Transfiguration of the Lord Christ, a new creation would break into the old. Jesus shows Peter, James and John His glory. Why? He had been talking about His death. He had been talking about rejection and suffering and a cross and now He shows Peter, James and John His glory, His inherent glory, His unending majesty.

Have you ever felt ashamed for being a Christian? Have you been wary of being teased or slandered or mocked for letting it be known that you owe your life to the crucified and risen Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus the Christ? Yep, I know that feeling too. That shame is a phantom. If God is for us, who could be against us (Romans 8:31)? Do you really believe that others have power over us? Real power? This is my beloved Son. Hear ye Him. When Jesus speaks to you of His cross, Peter, don’t insert your own twaddle. Christ’s cross is His glory. There is no other way to know the glory of God except through the suffering and death of God’s Son. When you see Him in agony for the world’s sin you are to see Him at His most radiant. His sacrifice is the Kingdom of God breaking into this fallen creation. His death is precisely what ushers in a new creation. Easter is the promise of a forgiving God who laid claim to us by the blood of His incarnate Son. We bend the knee at His name in season and out of season (Philippians 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:1-2). The threat of shame at being maligned by others for our

faith is a paper tiger. Peter rejoiced at being counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name (Acts 5:41). That is who I want to be. That is the kind of man that I want to be.

In the Transfiguration of our Lord, God is teaching you what to see when you look upon the Messiah in His suffering. Glorious! Transcendent! God of God and Light of Light; He is bearing the sins of the world and dying under the enormous weight of all death, all evil. Glorious! Transcendent! That glory is here. Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood. God's glory will not manifest itself in a way that human eyes can perceive. When He comes on the Last Day, you *will* see it. His kingdom, His majesty, His wounds, His eternal authority; you will see it. And you will know Him beautifully on that day for you know Him beautifully now. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Gladly, we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Him.