

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 413, 02-14-2021 † Transfiguration

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MARK 9

²After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain where they were alone by themselves. There he was transfigured in front of them. ³His clothes became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. ⁴And Elijah appeared to them together with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

⁵Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say because they were terrified.

⁷A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.”

⁸Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.



It was a mountaintop experience. I listened to a story on NPR about a grown son was touring ancient ruins on a mountain in South America. Suddenly, his mother did a double-take and stopped still in her tracks. “That man over there is your father.” The son had never met his father. Talk about a mountaintop experience.

He met his father on a mountain in South America. It was a mountaintop experience he did not expect. It was a fascinating beginning, but it was not the guarantee that it sounds like. It did not bring about an automatic loving relationship. It brought about a first conversation, contact information and a couple answers. It may have been more of a disappointment—a valley—than a mountaintop.

Jesus had three closest friends who witnessed a mountaintop experience. But to their confusion, it did not last. Instead the love of the Father pointed to something greater and higher.

The Love Of The Father For The Son

1. Denies our expectations

Jesus brought Peter, James and John up a high mountain. The word “transfiguration” means a complete change. But in what way did Jesus change? On the mountain that day, Jesus showed his divinity, wrapped in a cocoon of flesh. By very nature, Jesus was God. The disciples saw this in terms of dazzling white clothes. Jesus’ face shone like the sun. Essentially, God did not change on the mountain, but for a second, the Lord peeked outside of that cocoon. For a brief period of time on this mountain, the three disciples, Peter, James and John, witnessed the full glory of Jesus our Lord.

Not only that, Elijah and Moses were suddenly present. Prophets met apostles, Old Testament confronted the New Testament. There was a dense cloud and the voice of the Father expressing His love for the Son. What a mountaintop experience!

“Finally!” the disciples must have thought. Here (the mount of transfiguration) is where Jesus’ disciples wanted to be. Here was glory, power, and might. Staying here was appealing. What could possibly be better than the glory of God all day, every day? What could possibly be better than setting up a kingdom with Moses and Elijah, two ultimate prophets who had also witnessed Jesus’ glory during their lives? Who could imagine a greater heaven on earth?

To the three friends of Jesus, it was time to get building. What walls and turrets did they imagine? Raise a banner of strength and might. This was their chance. This mountain can be home base for warfare against the Gentiles and the Roman enemy. This was what Jesus had been training them to witness. Three tents would be a good beginning, but Peter, James, and John must have imagined a future unrivaled glory: a looming citadel to oversee the plain, a mighty pyramid to the skies, a righteous Rushmore for their expressions, a Babel to the heavens! Just think of the glorious army to accompany the majesty of the transfigured Lord. He will judge the nations and bring equity to the peoples. He

will take up the cause of the widow and the orphan. He will level the scales and raise the banner of might and majesty.

There are a few problems with making this mountain into a heaven-on-earth.

2. Answers important questions

First, there is the time frame. This was 6 days after Peter boldly confessed that Jesus is the Christ. At that time, Jesus spoke about his sufferings, death, and resurrection, but Peter rebuked him. Jesus ruthlessly explained that these are the things of God, that he must suffer and die. The season of suffering—NOT GLORY—was fast approaching.

Second, there is the prophets. Moses and Elijah were there to represent the Old Testament; that is, the Law (written by Moses) and the Prophets (of whom Elijah was prominent). If a heaven-on-earth were the goal of the Christ, then the Word of these prophets—the Word most certain—goes unfulfilled. If there is no cross, the prophecies are pointless. The plan could not go undone.

Third, there is the Father. He is not just there to tell us He loves Jesus, and maybe ask sweetly, “Will Jesus be His Valentine?” He says, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him.” Listen to what? Listen to the Word of the Son. His Word is Spirit and it is life. The Word is our strength. Listen to the Son’s description of salvation. Our access to the Father depends solely upon the Son.

The Son was about to embark on a lonely road indeed. But it was not on this mountain. It was to the mountain Golgotha, the place of the skull; that is, Calvary, the mount of the cross. The way to glory is as it always has been; through suffering and hardship. Only through terror and shame, persecution and punishment, enemies and execution does Jesus gain for us a good place.

Then the Father shows love for His other daughters and sons. For the Father rejects His Son on the cross. This is how God shows His love—by sacrificing His greatest treasure, Jesus Christ, the chosen One, the One and Only, for you.

“Tell no one until the resurrection” ... that would be the day of Easter. And from what we read in Luke 9:36, they actually follow instructions. They did not understand transfiguration—not until Easter. We do not understand rejoicing—not until the suffering and death of Jesus turns into the day of resurrection.

3. Ends incessant sadness

So what is life like for you? Is it glory? Is it a mountaintop experience which can only be defined by success and blessing? Or is it difficulties, hardships, and suffering? Is it sickness, setbacks, and selfishness? Isn't it sin, death, and the devil?

Success or suffering on earth—guess which one is more like Christ.

There is so much perseverance, character, and hope to be won by difficulties, hardships, and sufferings. We Christians bear a cross as well.

But there is also Christ Jesus to get us through this. There is also a God who has won the biggest battles for us, before us. He has been our Lord in every age, and we will learn *hallelujah* from Him yet. For He has won rejoicing for us forever ... through suffering.

The love of the Father points us to the Word of His Son. Jesus is speaking. He is speaking through Word and sacrament. He is telling you with every stroke of the pen what you need to hear. He is feeding you with every wafer and sip of wine. He is reminding you of your baptism with every washing. This is the love of the Father, that you listen to His Son. For life is full of valleys and low points. You need no mountaintop experience to learn the love of the Lord. Amen.