

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, February 23, 2020

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Glorious Jesus

Matthew 17:1–9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

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 (vv 1–2).

What's the most glorious place you've ever been or the most glorious experience you've ever had? If you could bottle up that view or that moment or what you felt there, I bet you'd do it in a heartbeat, wouldn't you? If you had your wish, you would've stayed in that moment forever. Glimpses of eternity are like that, and all too rare. They make us long for more. They create in us hope for a time when the glory never ends.

5.

For St. Peter, that moment was the transfiguration. Jesus took him, James, and John, **and led them up a high mountain by themselves** (v 1). To be part of Jesus' inner circle was special. But to be **with Him on the holy mountain** was extra special (1 Pet 1:18), because there they were **eyewitness of His majesty** and ear-witnesses of the **voice borne from heaven** (1 Pet 1:16, 18). St. Peter makes clear this this was no myth, no cleverly devised story, no second-hand account. He saw it. He heard it.

Jesus **was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light** (v 2). Peter, James, and John saw the divine power and majesty of our Lord unveiled in His human nature. It's as if His humanity had been thrust into the heat, light, and fire of the Godhead and came out glowing like the heaven of heavens. Though true man, He is not merely a man. Nor is He an angel. His face is the face of God, and His clothes have the radiance of God. There are other times during His earthly life when this divine power and majesty were visible. At His baptism in Spirit's descent and the voice from heaven. When He changed water into wine at Cana. When he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, stilled the storm, fed the thousands, and raised the dead. And especially here, at His transfiguration. God incarnate! Man divine!

Did I mention that **Moses and Elijah** were also there, **talking with Him** (v 3)? Moses! Elijah! These were the Greatest of All Time. By comparison, it would be like one of us getting to see Washington and Lincoln. *That* would be some President's Day!

What would you give to experience *that*—not Washington and Lincoln but Jesus with Moses and Elijah?! Yet only three did. Nine of the twelve disciples were left out of this one. So were the other first Christians. So was I. I've never seen Jesus transfigured like that. I've never seen anything remotely close to that. I've never once seen Jesus in His visible body.

4.

No wonder, then, that St. Peter wanted to stay there. Never one to be shy or keep quiet, he piped up, "**Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you wish, I'll make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah**" (v 4). Why don't we just stay here? It can't get any better than this, can it? What could possibly make it more glorious? There's no reason to go back down from this high point ever! Three tents—one for Moses and the law; one for Elijah and the prophets; one for Jesus. But does he think that these three are somehow equal? That Moses and Elijah are just like Jesus? That the Law and the Prophets somehow have a message and life independent of Him?

It's the glory that's so attractive, and we're attracted to it, too. When you think of a glorious place or experience, I bet the cross doesn't cross your mind. Suffering and death have nothing to do with glory. They're the exact opposite. That's how we think. That's how St. Peter thought. But that's not setting the mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. There is something missing from the transfiguration. There is something even more glorious ahead for Jesus. The transfiguration is only the trailer, the preview, a snippet. It's like reading a tweet about the novel *Les Misérables* and thinking you know it. The Transfiguration is just the tip of heaven, just enough to whet your appetite, just enough to make you long for more.

3.

There are glimpses of glory, but there are no shortcuts to glory. You can't put those glimpses in a tent. You can't bottle them up. You *can* speak of them to others and write them down, which is what Peter, James, and John eventually did. But not right away. Before they could tell anyone, they first had to listen. You know the saying, right? God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason.

That's not *quite* what He said to those three disciples but close. It was nearly "Shut up and listen." St. Peter was still talking about putting up three tents, maybe even drawing up plans for them, **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” (v 5). It terrified the disciples—knees-shaking, teeth-chattering terror. Theirs was a terrifying glory! They **fell on their faces** (v 6). So much for our vain attempts to capture glory or hold on to it. It slips through our hands like sand or out of our bowels like terror.

2.

Less than a week before this St. Peter had made his wonderful confession about who Jesus is: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Matt 16:16). This is the basic Christian confession of the person of Jesus. It is the foundation on which the Church is built. The Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds and even the Catechisms and our Book of Concord are nothing more than further elaborations of it. St. Peter had the right words, but he didn’t fully understand what it meant. Something more needed to be added. What? **Listen to Him!**

And this is what He says. Just prior to the Transfiguration, **Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, on the third day be raised** (Matt 16:21). What’s missing is the necessity of His death and resurrection. Again, almost immediately after the Transfiguration, **Jesus said to them, “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”** (Matt 17:22–23). As I said, there are no shortcuts. Jesus takes the long and weary road. His path must go through Lent and Holy week, so we follow Him there. Peter, James, and John will see Him in glory again. *We* will see Him in glory, but with a glory even greater than the Transfiguration.

WHAT’S MISSING FROM THE GLORY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION?
THOSE GLORIOUS SCARS!

He doesn’t have them yet.

1.

There is an order to Jesus’ kingdom. It is suffering before glory. His suffering to win your glory. And His suffering to redeem your suffering. Suffering is hard, but that doesn’t make it bad. And not everything that glitters or feels good or is easy is glorious. There’s no glory, no final, ultimate, eternal glory without those scars, without the wounds where the nails ripped His flesh and where the spear tore at His side and where the thorns drilled into His skull. Those glorious scars!

No one gets through life without scars. I can still remember the scar on my stomach from a bike accident, and the one on my thumb from trying to slice open a golf ball, and the scar where my eyebrow split from a basketball collision. At the center of Jesus' glory are scars: His scars, gained by His loving service of you. Scarred hands. Scarred feet. Scarred head. Scarred side. That's what Jesus shows the disciples in His resurrected glory. Touch Me and see! That's what the saints around the throne of heaven see as they worship the Lamb in glory—a Lamb slain, with the scars of being a sacrifice, slain but standing. Jesus at His resurrection and in His second coming will have *that* glory. Not just the glory that He has in Himself, but the glory He won for you on the cross.

So what does that mean for us now, as we long for glory? Same thing it meant for the disciples. *Not yet* an end to your suffering. *Not yet* visible victory over sin. *Not yet* the dead rising. But soon. And the same invitation they received: **Listen to Him**. Listen to Him proclaim His death as your victory. Listen to Him give His body and blood to you for the forgiveness of sins. Listen to Him baptize and absolve. The Father said this about His Son and about all who stand in the stead and by the command of His Son to forgive sins and preach the Word.

The chief way we worship God isn't by building tents or chasing glory. It's by listening to the Son and receiving the forgiveness of sins. St. Peter was there on the holy mountain, yet he said, "**We have something more sure—more sure!—the prophetic Word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts**" (2 Pet 2:19).

Even if the place we're in seems so void of glory, even if it's overwhelming darkness, and the weight of sin, death, and the devil is heavy, still we have a **shining lamp**. God has bottled up the glory of the transfiguration, the cross, and the resurrection for you. Where? In God's own word. His Word revealing the glorious face of Jesus and points to the glory that is yet to come. And the truth is, dear friends, that you can't stay here, in this fallen world and inglorious place, with sin, death, and the devil on the prowl. The tent you're living in now, in which you suffer and struggle, this tent isn't eternal. It won't last. All this is temporary. And that includes your scars, though not His. His glory is and will be forever.

And you get more than a glimpse of that glory today—you get a deposit, down payment, and foretaste. In the glorious name placed on you, the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; in the glorious absolution that washed away your sins; in the glorious body and blood of scarred Jesus, son of the living God and Savior of the world. Everything else is darkness, even the glories of this world. Cling to the light

of the Word until the Last Day, when the brighter light of Christ returning in glory will overwhelm it.

Listen to Him, dear Christian, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
