

The Transfiguration  
19 February 2023  
Text: Matthew 17:1-9  
Theme: "Confidence in Christ Alone"

Prayer: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1A One of the really interesting parts of being a Navy Chaplain is the diversity of perspectives from which I get to hear. I hear from every point along the spectrum of Christianity from the most hardcore Eastern Orthodox to the most wildly progressive unitarians. I visit with Latter Day Saints and Seventh Day Adventists and everyone in between. I work closely with Jews and Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs. I spend a huge amount talking with people who consider themselves to be spiritual but not religious. I also engage that part of the public that has no time for religion but still needs help being its best self. What I see is that everyone from the down home evangelical to the most vehement atheist feels under attack. No one feels safe.

1B Everyone feels insecure and in danger of being misunderstood and maybe even "cancelled" as a result. Fear is the order of the day. That fear shows up in many forms. Never in my life has there been such a tidal wave of manufactured outrage. Rarely have I seen the kind of intolerance and blind unthinking partisanship that has characterized our public square these last few years. People are rarely at their best when they are afraid. That's why we give medals to people who do perform exceptionally when they are terrified. Neither the church nor the state has been in peak form lately. The season of Lent will be arriving just in time for us this year.

2A I have some experience with hostile environments and I know what it is to be afraid and still need to do your duty. I doubt than any of us here this morning will find ourselves on the battlefield any time soon and yet we are all embattled. The whole world is our enemy and we are feeling it more than we're used to. We learn from the Small Catechism that our enemies are the devil, the world, and our flesh. But we tend to doubt that truth. All three look pretty good to us.

2B Its only after we've ignored God's warnings and cozied up to them that they reveal their true colors. It doesn't matter what political party you belong to. It doesn't matter what economic model or system of government you prefer. It doesn't matter what you think about medicine or health care. Everyone has had their confidence in everything shaken during the last few years and the hits just keep coming. And what have we done in response; many have doubled down on our factionalism, circled the wagons. Some of us, though, have pulled in the opposite direction. We've given up. We've capitulated. We've decide, or so we tell ourselves, to change with the time. None of us, though, seems to have learned much of anything from all of our hard knocks.

2C We can see both of the reactions in our friends and neighbors. We can see both reactions on the church signs we drive past in our own towns. All of us, it seems, have forgotten something critically important. This world and everything in it will pass away. The Bible is clear that it will all end in fire. All the will remain once the earth and the moon and the sun and stars have passed away will be the God and His people. And all that will matter are the relationships that connect us. The love that binds us will be all that matters when the money and the houses and the cars and the collections and the borders and the parties have all been burned away.

3A What does this world have to offer us anyway? Nations rise and fall. Kingdoms come and go. Ours will be no different. What did God the Father say to God the Son in the Gradual? "I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." We are just passing through this place and it won't be here that long anyway. We're not supposed to fit in here. We shouldn't want to anyway. This is not our home and we should not get too attached to it.

3B St. Peter was right to want to stay with Jesus and Moses and Elijah and, presumably, with James and John. He wasn't out of his mind or crazy for wanting that moment to continue as long

as possible. He was just mistaken to think that it had anything to do with geography or location. On the Mount of Transfiguration he was aware of God's gracious and powerful presence in his life and never wanted to be without that awareness again. Who wouldn't want to be mental, physically, and spiritually aware of Jesus. Christ doesn't want him to be without it. He doesn't want us to be without it either. 40 days after this moment of transfiguration Jesus would establish the Lord's Supper and 50 days after that He would pour out His spirit on the Church and send it out, beginning with St. Peter, to preach the Word, baptize all nations, and absolve the faithful.

3C Peter and James and John merely saw with their eyes and heard with their ears. We now hear and see but also taste and smell and feel. They were present with Jesus in a temporal and temporary way. He is with in Body and Blood. He can never separated form us and we cannot be separated Him. Neither time nor space can come between those who have been given His Holy Spirit in Baptism, those who have received His Body and Blood into their own flesh and blood, those who have felt His absolving touch in hand of the Pastor.

4A We don't find our safety and satisfaction on the Mount of Transfiguration or on Mount Sinai or in any particular place in this temporary world. We certainly don't find it political parties or corporate connections or bank accounts or social media accounts. St. Augustine was right when he observed that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. We look for Christ and His comforting Spirit in those places where He had promised to be found; the Means of Grace. God is everywhere and in ways we cannot apprehend or imagine but He has only promised to come to us in the Preaching of the Word, the Lord's Supper, Holy Baptism, and in Pastoral Absolution. These are the only ways in which He forgives our sins, strengthens our faith, and binds Himself to us. These are our comfort in a world that wants nothing to do with us.

4B My heart breaks to see Christians, whether inside or outside our synod, suffering because

they are looking for God in places other than His Word and Sacraments. My heart breaks for us when we needlessly hurt ourselves and others because we give in to the temptation to make ourselves feel safe by fighting our neighbors instead of loving them or capitulate to them rather than sharing the not-at-all secret to happiness, being connected in body and soul to Jesus Christ.

Sometimes when we confess our sins we repent of what we have done and what we have not done. That's what we're talking about here; soothing ourselves with sins of commission and sins of omission. In either case, there is only one remedy, absolution. Which we have received.

4C So what difference does that connection and that absolution make in our lives? First of all being connected to Jesus in body and soul means that we are filled with His Holy Spirit and that the Holy Ghost works in us and through us to do things that we would not otherwise be able to do. If the fruits of the spirit were available with the spirit the world would be a very different place and we'd all know it. The Holy Ghost helps us rise above the world around us, not like Moses on the Mountaintop or St. Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration but like St. Stephen who, when he was being murdered by the yet to be converted St. Paul, prayed for the forgiveness of his killers. Being bound inseparably to the Holy Trinity allows to be more forgiving of the people we live with and among, it allows us to be fearless in the face of the devil, the world, and the betrayals of our own flesh. It enables us to be more patient and selfless and balanced and open.

5A Being connected by Word and Sacrament to our Lord and Savior allows makes us uniquely generous. We don't need our family members or friends or neighbors or anyone to make us feel safe. We have an invincible champion in whom we can be bold and gentle and who meets all of our needs. We are free to be good to others rather than dependent on their good because we have a God who gives us everything we need from our daily bread to His own Holy Precious Body and Blood. We need fear nothing from the world because we have overcome it.

5B The Gospel spreads fastest and most powerfully during times of persecution and oppression. It spreads because of the amazing confidence of Christians in the face of adversity. That confidence comes from Jesus who is always and perfectly with us. Even as we enter the season of Lent with its focus on repentance and preparation He bookends the whole thing with two bright shining lights, His glory on the Mount of Transfigurations and His radiant life changing resurrection in which we find the strength to march boldly through this world and into the next. Amen. **RISE.** *Now, the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*