

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Life is filled with high points and low points. And our spiritual life likewise is filled with high points and low points. This morning we get to experience together a spiritual high point. It's a high point both literally and figuratively. We follow Jesus up a mountain to a peak. And at that peak we see him transformed. Peering at this peak, we get a glimpse of his glory. And what we see is magnificent. And with Peter we will have to confess: "It's good Lord to be here!"

But this glimpse of Jesus' glory did not last long. That high point turned into the lowest point for Jesus' disciples a few months later when he was arrested, put on trial, abused, beaten, mocked, wrongly condemned, put on a cross, and finally he died.

We, Jesus' modern day disciples, are about to follow Jesus on the same path. This Wednesday already we begin the Season of Lent with Ash Wednesday. We will continue to focus on Jesus' suffering and death through April 6th. In some ways, Lent may feel like a low point. There is definitely a somber, reflective and repentant tone in Lent. There are definitely some difficult things for us to think about and contemplate: the horrible reality that our daily sins are offensive and disgusting to our holy God; that Jesus' suffering was bloody and excruciatingly painful. (By the way, did you know our word "excruciating" comes from the Latin and means "from the cross." It's an adjective to describe the worst kind of pain.) His death was an apparent tragedy of justice to the highest degree imaginable. These are the hard things we think about during Lent.

But it's also a season of the church year that fills you with comfort and peace beyond all other. For only when we take a long hard work at the event surrounding the cross of Christ do we gain a real appreciation for the love of God for us. Only there do we really understand what it means that God *gave* his one and only Son.

Now, I don't want to get ahead of ourselves because we're not in the season of Lent yet. That starts Ash Wednesday (and I hope you'll all come back for that service of repentance.) Today is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. There is a reason Epiphany comes before Lent. Epiphany is all about the glory of Jesus and how it was revealed while he was on earth. Today we peer at the peak and see perhaps the clearest revelation of Jesus' glory and majesty before his death. We need this peak! We need this clear revelation that he is God's only Son, he is glorious and true God, and that he is fully approved by his Father as we prepare to enter into the valley that is the season of Lent.

As we peer at this glorious peak, there are three things we want to treasure up and keep with us as we come down off that mountain. Let's listen to the account recorded in Mark 9:2-9.

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

7 Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is

my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

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

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

Put yourself in the place of Jesus’ disciples. About a week earlier, Jesus told his disciples clearly and straight out, (Mark 8:31) **“the Son of Man must suffer many things”** and **“he must be killed.”** The disciples were shocked at this news. Peter even rebuked Jesus for saying such things. They didn’t yet fully understand who Jesus was or what he would do.

Jesus knew that his arrest, suffering and death would shake the faith of his disciples. Perhaps they would even forget that he was the Son of God. How could they remember this important truth? They needed the proof and the miracle of Jesus’ transfiguration.

Jesus “led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.” As they watched, Jesus changed. It was still Jesus but his body changed as his glory shone. He was transformed into something different. His future glory came upon him. His clothes were shining white --brighter than any man could ever bleach them. These men saw with their own eyes Jesus’ glory. This was no ordinary human being. Before their eyes they saw the Son of God.

The men who witnessed this event were Peter, James and John. The Bible doesn’t tell us why these three were chosen. Perhaps they had the best understanding of who Jesus was. Maybe it was because of their future positions in the church. Peter would later become a leader in the church. James would be the first of the apostles to be killed because of his faith. And John would be the only apostle to reach old age.

So what’s the 1st reason for the Transfiguration? It was proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

These disciples saw more: **“And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”** There were heavenly witnesses to this glorious event as well. Why were Elijah and Moses present? Jesus often said that “the Law and the Prophets testify about me.” The Old Testament Scriptures were often called “the Law and the Prophets.”. The Law referred to Moses’ writings, that is, the first 5 books of the Bible. The prophets referred to all of the writings of God’s prophets. One of the greatest of God’s prophets was Elijah. On this mount of transfiguration, Elijah and Moses bore witness to the fact that this Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah whom they had foretold. They testify that he is in fact the Son of God!

There was a second reason they were there. It says they were talking with Jesus. One of the other Gospels tells us that they were talking with him about his coming suffering and death. And so we see the second reason for the Transfiguration. It was also a **preparation for his death.** These two prophets of old talk with Jesus about the Father’s plan of a salvation. This was a help and support for Jesus... but also for the disciples. They also heard not just from Jesus but from Moses and Elijah that the coming death of Jesus was God’s will and God’s plan to save us.

The Father also speaks to prepare Jesus... and his disciples... and us... for Jesus’ suffering and death. Then a voice from heaven says, **“This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!”** Jesus would know the Father still fully approves of him and the work he had done. As Jesus prepares to die, we don’t have to wonder if the Father was displeased with his Son, and therefore sentenced him to die on the cross. No, the Father loved his Son! And was pleased with him! Therefore the death he would die would not be for anything he had done. It would be for what we have done.

And then the Father says to us, “**Listen to him!**” As true God, we all must listen to Jesus. God our heavenly Father himself witnesses that Jesus far surpasses the prophets in authority and power because he is his true God. Listen!

Peter James and John would later be able to see the significance of the transfiguration. During the troubling times ahead, they had comfort in having seen Jesus’ glory. They would come to know that it was God himself who suffered terribly. They would know it was God himself who died on that cross. They would know why his suffering and death could pay for the sins of the whole world. Having peered at the peak, *they were prepared for his death.*

Friends, we also are now witnesses of Jesus’ glory. We now also know from this glorious event that this was the Son of God who died **not** because he had to, but because he loved us. This was the Son of God whose bleeding and dying was enough to give us the hope of heaven because it redeems us from all our sins. The story of the transfiguration is just the **proof** we need as we enter into the valley of his suffering and death: Jesus is the Son of God. It also is **preparation** for us as we follow him to his death.

Transfiguration does one more thing for us. **It was a prelude to his glory.** While on this earth, Jesus temporarily gave up his divine and eternal majesty, power and glory. He humbled himself while he walked among us. But the Transfiguration is a prelude to his glory. His victory is assured as we see his divine nature shine through.

To peer at this peak is a good thing. To see Jesus shine in all his power and glory brings great comfort. It’s what moved Peter to say:

“**Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.**” With Peter we want to stay on the mountain. We want to live in the glory. But the transfiguration ended suddenly. Moses and Elijah were gone. The cloud that enveloped them lifted. Jesus stopped shining. They found themselves walking back down that mountain and Jesus was resolutely walking toward Jerusalem. To his betrayal. To his capture. Finally, to the cross. I wonder if Peter, James or John peered back at the peak during all of that. Did they remember the **proof** that he is true God? Did they remember that he was **prepared** for exactly this death for the sins of the world? Did they remember the **prelude** to his glory which ensured that he would rise victorious over sin and death and Satan? Every indication was that they forgot.

But what about us? Don’t we do the same thing? When we walk through the low points in our lives, do we remember? When we struggle with our health... job loss... financial hardships... painful relationships... huge setbacks... do we remember? Do we peer at the glorious peak, or focus on the dark valley? As we go through Lent... and as you go through whatever hardships enter your life, would you peer back at that peak? See Jesus shining in glory! Hear the testimony of long dead prophets... who were alive! Hear the testimony of the Father! 1) See the **proof** that he truly is God, and therefore his sacrifice for sin was complete! 2) As Jesus was **prepared** for his death, so you also will be prepared there for whatever low points you go through. 3) See his glory which was a **prelude** of eternal glory, and be confident of his victory. For this will assure you that ultimately, Jesus victory will be yours. The troubles of this world will surely pass, and you will be with you God forever and ever.

Peer at the peak. See the glory of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That peak will get you through the valleys! Amen.