

“Christ Our Light; the Hope of Glory and the Light of Our Lives”

Matthew 17:1-9

Sermon for the Transfiguration of Our Lord 2022; February 6, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

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So, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, James’ brother, up to a high mountain by themselves. There Jesus was transfigured or transformed before them. Matthew describes it like this: “His face shined like the sun, and His garments became white or bright as the light” (Mat. 17:2). And then the heavenly Father testified about Jesus, when the bright, shining cloud overshadowed them: “This is My beloved Son with whom I am pleased. Listen to Him” (Mat. 17:5). They saw this with their eyes and heard it with their ears. As the Apostle Peter says, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16) because they “were with [Jesus] on the mountain” (2 Peter 1:17, 18).

Peter emphasizes that they were not telling clever myths when they made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but they were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Peter 1:16). What great grace and mercy on God’s part that Jesus as Lord and Savior should be revealed to the apostles in a way that could be seen and heard as events in the world. And then this seeing and hearing could become testimony and preaching and teaching good news to us so that we can hear and believe and have our minds and hearts inspired and enlightened with the light of Jesus Christ.

This event of the transfiguration of Jesus is quite important. It is important in what it shows us about Jesus as our Lord and God and our Savior. It is important in what it teaches us about life in this world that is lived “under the cross.” It is also important in what it teaches about what we are and should want to be in Jesus. Let us talk about these things.

The first thing the transfiguration of Jesus teaches has to do with Jesus Himself as our Lord and God. This is about what Jesus is in His being. He is Lord, meaning He is true God. We get this from Peter referring to His majesty. We get this from Matthew telling us that Jesus’ face shined like the sun and His garments were white or bright as the light. We get this from what the Scriptures teach about God when we take the event in light of the teaching of God’s Word in the Old Testament.

So, Matthew says that Jesus’ face shined like the sun. Psalm 84:11 says, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield” (Ps. 84:11 NKJV). The Prophet Isaiah says, “So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun” (Is. 59:19 ESV). And then Isaiah says this: “The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory” (Is. 60:19 ESV). So when Jesus’ face shines like the sun, He is revealed as the Lord our God.

Matthew says that Jesus’ garments were bright like the light. Psalm 104 says, “Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment” (Psalm 104:1-2a ESV). The Apostle John, who was with Jesus on the mountain says this: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5b ESV). Jesus says to us: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12 ESV).

So Jesus is revealed as Lord and God on the mountain of His transfiguration. What they saw would remind them of the testimony of the Scripture. And Jesus is our light, the light of salvation given by the Father. We know the joyful shout, for we walk in the light of the LORD’S face

(Psalm 89:15); we walk with Jesus.

This revelation of Jesus is confirmed by the testimony of the Father: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I pleased. Listen to Him” (Mat. 17:5). This testimony of the Father tells us where God is to be found for salvation and truth. I am pleased with Him, says the Father. Listen to Him, says the Father.

Who Jesus is as Lord and God is also vitally important because it shows us who went to the cross for us and was laid in the tomb for us and rose to indestructible life for us, on the third day. It is our Lord and God, the Son of the Father. What sin do you have that is greater than God’s Son, that He cannot atone for in the sacrifice of Himself? There is no sin greater than Him. This is not a license to sin, not if we walk in the light that Christ is; but it is relief for the guilty conscience of the one who wishes that their sin were not so, and turns to God for help. In such turning Christ is there with complete forgiveness and Himself as the gift of righteousness before the Father. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him (Psalm 2:12), for He is the Son.

But Jesus’ glory as God shining through His human nature was only for a moment. It is an important glimpse of His divine majesty. But it became hidden once again behind His human nature. This hiddenness of Jesus’ majesty is important for us because we see what happens when human beings come into the presence of the glory of God. Peter, James, and John were afraid. They cannot stand in the presence of God’s glory on their own. No creature corrupted by disobedience can. God’s glory is wonderful, but it is also holy. Jesus can stand in God’s presence. He is holy. But we cannot; not in ourselves. We need to stand in the holiness of another; our Lord Jesus. He is given as the gift just so we can stand in Him.

So, it is profoundly good news for us that Jesus went over to the terrified disciples and touched them and said: “Arise, and do not be afraid” (Mat. 17:7). Jesus is the Man in whom the glory of God is present, yet hidden. Since it is hidden in Him, we can stand and not be afraid. So let it be for us as it was for them: “And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one, but only Jesus” (Mat. 17:8).

But what lies ahead of Jesus from the standpoint of the mount of transfiguration? Betrayal. Evil men twisting the civil authority and true justice to put Him to death. Suffering. Death. Rising on the third day.

So, here is another important thing about the majesty and glory of God the Son being hidden behind Jesus’ human flesh and nature. He will endure suffering. He will die on a cross. His glory is hidden in suffering and death. His glory is hidden in the struggle with evil in this world. If His glory were not so hidden behind His human nature, then He could not suffer and die; then He could not struggle with evil, but only destroy it. But then He could not rise from death in our flesh, gaining the supreme victory. But then He could not win our atonement.

But this suffering and death and struggle with evil that He endures, because His glory is hidden behind His flesh, is our suffering and death and struggle. Because His glory is concealed behind His humanity He joins us in our humanity. He sanctifies the true joys and good things God gives in this world. He also joins us in our suffering and death and struggle. He knows our joys, He knows our fears and pain.

But since His glory was seen for a moment then went back behind the veil, that is, His flesh, so we know who has given us all good things; who is walking with us in the struggle; who goes with us into the grave; in whom, with whom we will arise out of death into His indestructible life. And since the light of His glory is hidden behind the veil, so we too have the light of His glory shining in our hearts, even as we live under the cross and in the weakness of our fallen nature. It is as the Apostle Paul says: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting

away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2. Cor. 4:16-17 ESV).

This light of Christ and in Christ is hidden even in you by the Spirit and faith even as your outer self is wasting away, even as Christ’s glory was hidden behind His flesh, in which He suffered for us and with us, and then lived again in immortality. And one day, on the day of His appearing again, when the “the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,” as Peter says (2 Peter 2:19 ESV), you will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father (Mat. 13:43), Jesus Himself being your light and righteousness before the Father.

This is how the transfiguration shows us our salvation in Jesus.

It also shows us something important about our life, as we live in Jesus. Light in the Scriptures is contrasted with the darkness of wickedness, lawlessness, evil, and malice. Malice means thinking, wishing, and wanting evil for someone else. So, as we hold to Jesus by faith as the Light of our salvation, let us walk in goodness, and holiness, obedience to God’s word, and truth in our pilgrimage here. Light in Christ is going the way of goodness, truth, and love, love that does no harm to the neighbor but seeks our neighbor’s well-being. The Apostle Paul speaks to us about this when he says: “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:8-11 ESV). Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, urges the Apostle Paul (Rom. 12:2). Jesus was transformed for the apostles to see. Let us be transformed in Jesus in His light as He is light. And He does this work in us by His Spirit through His word, as the Apostle says: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 ESV). As Christ is the Light, so He is transforming us in the light, so we can say with the Psalmist: “For with you [, O Lord,] is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light” Psalm 36:9 ESV).

So in the transfiguration of our Lord, we see who He is in His being, and, therefore, who He is for us. We see our life and our destiny in Him, which is light and life in the glory of God, even though it is hidden now under the sinfulness, suffering, and death of our fallen nature. But He is renewing us day by day in Himself by His Spirit, giving us hope in the midst of it all, and inspiring in us the life of light in God in the midst of a dark world and dark experience. With what thanksgiving then we receive for ourselves through Christ’s word the testimony of what Peter, James, and John saw and heard on that on the holy mountain. For what they saw is our life and salvation, and the light that enlightens and renews our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.