

Transfiguration

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

¹After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

He Picks Up Those who Tremble

This morning I would invite you to consider some of the people in the Bible who saw the glory of the Lord. When God gave the 10 Commandments to the people in Exodus 20, they heard the voice of the Lord and saw His glory. They trembled with fear and told Moses, *“Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”* Moses told them, *“Do not be afraid God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”* (Ex 20:18-20) When Solomon dedicated the temple, the Bible says that the glory of the Lord filled it. The Israelites knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground. They worshiped and gave thanks to God saying, *“He is good; His love endures forever.”* (2 Chr. 7:3) In Isaiah 6 the prophet sees God in all of His glory. He cries out, *“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord almighty.”* (Is 6:5) In Luke 5 both Peter and a man with leprosy come to realize who Jesus is. Peter fell on his knees and cried out to Jesus, *“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.”* (Lk 5:8) The man with leprosy fell with his face to the ground and begged Jesus, *“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”* (Lk 5:12) All of these people trembled before the Lord’s glory, just as the disciples did at Jesus’ transfiguration, but in all of these cases we see how the Lord reached down and picked them up with His grace and mercy.

I. Today I am afraid that we often take God’s glory for granted.

We seldom come close to having the same fear and awe that these people had before God. That is reflected in a number of ways. It is reflected in our worship. In recent years there has been a trend to make worship comfortable, friendly and inviting. There is some good with regard to that, but almost everything that gives a sense of respect and humility has been discarded. One of the best examples of that is that Christians seldom kneel in worship anymore. At one time Christians knelt for things like the confession of sins, the prayers, the Sanctus and the Words of Institution. I found out this week from some of our elderly members that few Missouri Synod churches ever had kneelers, but the people knelt on the floor for the confession of sins. Today very few churches have kneelers anymore. Most of those that do have padded ones. I remember well when I was a child, that if you came to church late, you had to wait to enter. The doors were shut from the invocation until

a little break after the collect. (Our family was often late, and we spent many Sundays in the narthex). I even notice that I often have to remind men to remove their hats in church today as a sign of respect. That sense that we are standing in the presence of God in worship is something that all of us take for granted at some time today.

That might even be reflected in our table prayers at home. Does it ever happen at your home, that people are still running around when we pray or that we rush through our prayers. Sometimes our prayers are nothing more than a brief pause in the discussion that we are having. When we think of how we sometimes pray, we might as well say, “Good food, good meat, good God let’s eat.”

It’s also reflected in how we often talk about worship today. As I listen to much of the Christian talk about worship today, it seems as though God should feel honored that we are giving our worship to Him. There is a song called “I Choose You”, which in my opinion brings out that attitude in the refrain which goes,

And I choose You
 All my attention, affection
 And all my devotion’s for You
 If everybody’s worshipping something
 I choose You.

Think of who is it that we are worshiping, and who we are. The disciples saw Jesus in all of His glory. They heard the Father’s voice from heaven. When they realized who Jesus was, they fell on their faces. Israel trembled with fear at Mount Sinai. They fell on their faces in the temple. Isaiah and Peter cried out, “Woe is me!” The man with leprosy fell to the ground and begged Jesus for mercy. When we gather for worship, and when we pray to God, we come into the presence of the Almighty God, who is our creator and judge. On the other hand we realize that we are sinners, who do not deserve to stand in the presence of the almighty God. When we think of who Jesus is, that He is God-almighty in the flesh, and that we are poor, miserable sinners, there should be a sense of fear and trembling.

II. But Jesus picks up those who tremble before Him.

He did that with all those people that I mentioned earlier. Peter, James, and John were face down on the ground, trembling with fear. Jesus came and touched them and said, “*Get up, don’t be afraid.*” When Israel trembled at Mount Sinai, Moses said, “*Do not be afraid. God has come to test you...*” (Ex 20:20) When Isaiah trembled at the glory of the Lord, an angel came to him and said, “*Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.*” (Is 6:7) After Peter fell on his knees and confess that he is a sinful man, Jesus responded, “*Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.*” (Lk 5:10) When the leper begged Jesus to heal him, Jesus answered, “*I am willing. Be clean.*” (Lk 5:13)

Jesus also picks us up with His grace and mercy. At the beginning of our worship service, we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners. Then God pronounces the forgiveness of all of our sins because He paid for them all on the cross. We come to this altar and kneel before His presence, and He gives us His body and blood which were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. We hear those words, “Depart in peace.” We pray for His presence at our meals at home, and He does come as our guest and fills our homes with His grace. We realize that we don’t deserve anything good from God.

We ask for His mercy and His grace. In various ways, His hand reaches down to touch us. He comforts us. He tells us not to be afraid. He is our Savior, who picks us up and gives us a share in that glory that we don't deserve. It is ours purely by His grace and mercy for us.

Like much of the Bible, I see a correlation with the story of the tax collector and the pharisee. We are tempted to be like the pharisee who thought that he deserved to see God's glory. He thought that God should have been pleased to have someone like him on His side. But when we consider the glory of God, we realize that we are like the tax collector. We are sinners, who don't deserve to be in God's presence at all. We tremble, but just like that tax collector and the disciples in our text, Jesus lifts us up. He forgives our sins and gives us a share in His glory.

May God give us all that godly fear, that we may be lifted up by His grace to have a share in the glory that He has won for us.

Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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www.benediction-lcms.org*