

## CONTINUING TO HEAR JESUS

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord:

*Then, in His continuing to speak, behold, (a) cloud shining overshadowed them; and, behold, (a) Voice out of the cloud saying, "This One remains My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I (am) well pleased. All of you must continue to hear Him."<sup>1</sup>*

Two weeks ago, those among us who are regular in hearing the Word of God in this place heard words which reflect the sense of that text. On that day, the Baptism of our Lord, two men witnessed to the Voice from the heavens which declared Jesus as the Beloved Son of God. For them, it was God's witness that John's Divine Call to preach a baptism of repentance into the forgiveness of sins was to give way for Jesus' Divine Call. His Call is to declare Himself as the manifestation of God's grace. He would be given into death bearing the whole world's sins that His Word of forgiveness might be for all people, for all time. That was good for Jesus and John, and was necessary to fulfill all things to make it possible for humans to be right with the Father.

But, by the time of today's events, the Baptizing One, John, had been beheaded. That left just one witness to the Voice and signs at Jesus' Baptism. That, for He was not yet the glorified Son of God, would not have been enough to establish as true testimony all that had occurred in any Israelite court of Law. So, today, we have heard God's witness in Jesus' Baptism at the Jordan affirmed.

That comes to us today from the eyewitness records of three men's testimony. Their word of the Voice from the glorious cloud gives us even more to hear, learn and inwardly digest than that which was proclaimed at Jesus' Baptism. Today's narrative of God's Word concerning the divinity and mission of Jesus is recorded in what are called the Synoptic (which literally, "seen together") Gospels. The witness of Peter, James and John on that Mountain made holy by God's Presence is recorded in three Gospel Books.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 17:5.

In the Synoptics, St. Luke uses just a single different word than Sts. Matthew and Mark in order to describe the declaration of the Father's relationship to the Son. Yet all three hold the Father's command in the exact same formula, (ακουετε αυτου) translated for us like this: "All of you must continue to hear Him."

The sense of that phrase, given first to three disciples close to Jesus, is then passed on by three Evangelists to all the disciples of Jesus who would come after His death, resurrection and ascension into the heavens. (Interestingly, that day, He was received in a cloud. That might be important to today's text and to Jesus' return on the Last Day. I'm just saying you might want to do a bit of study on that topic yourself; there is not enough time for that in this sermon). In any case, we now turn back to the Transfiguration of Jesus text. We will be led into the reason for this whole event to which the Apostles and Evangelists testify. Hear again how today's witness for the ages begins:

*Then, after six days, Jesus continued to take alongside the Peter and James and John the brother of him, and He continued to lead them up into (a) mountain high, privately.<sup>2</sup>*

The start of the reading should prompt a question. The answer to that question, together with the parallel readings in Mark and Luke, will give us the reason that the Transfiguration of our Lord has been remembered as the Epiphany Season has transitioned into pre-Lent for the past several hundred years. So, what is the question you who are in this place following the command of the Voice from heaven are led to ask? Don't answer too fast for the text can lead to many questions.

For example, the query that gets to the heart of the reason for the Transfiguration is not, "On what mountain did this all take place?" There are at least four of those to which theologians have pointed to as being "the one" over the centuries since. Even so, the particular mountain is not named in any of the Scriptures which speak of this day's feast. So, what is the first question God is leading you to ask from the opening words of today's reading?

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 17:1.

It should be, “Six days after what?” From time-to-time a preacher will complain that the pericopes leave out too much for us to get the whole picture each week. Yet, in the examples like today’s, which open by referring to events just past about which we have not heard, there is wisdom. For, in giving us that opening, and not all the words before, the preacher should be led by the Word of God to declare to you what comes before. That is, if it is really important to the understanding of the day’s Scriptural testimony. This day’s opening phrase, “after six days,” when coupled with the dialogue between Jesus, Moses and Elijah contained in St. Luke’s account of the Transfiguration, shows us clearly where Jesus appears for all humans in the Glory of His Divinity. So, what happened six days before the events which occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration? And, what were Jesus, Moses, and Elijah discussing? (Please be patient and wait through the next couple of minutes for that last question to be answered).

First, we answer the six days question. Just short of a week before Jesus was transformed before the eyes of His disciples, Simon, son of Jonah had confessed Jesus to remain, “The Christ, the Son of the God, the Living One.”<sup>3</sup> That fits with the testimony of the Voice from heaven in today’s text does it not?

Wait! That is not all that happened on that day, six days before Jesus led the three up into the high mountain. For, after Simon’s confession, Jesus gave him the name of Peter, “the Rock.” (That appears to be why he is called “the Peter” in today’s text when he is named with James and John).

In addition, Jesus handed to those who held to Peter’s confession of Jesus, that which Jesus calls, “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” They are the power of the proclaimed Word to bind unrepentant sinners in their sins. They are also the power of the pronounced Word to loose the repentant from their bonds to sin, death, and hell.

But, that is not all that happened six days before Jesus ascended the mountain! For, in that time period before His Transfiguration, Jesus also,

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<sup>3</sup> *Matthew 16:16b.*

*began to show to the disciples of Him that it remained necessary for Him into Jerusalem to go, and much to suffer from the Elders and High-Priests and Scribes and to be killed and by the third day to be raised.*<sup>4</sup>

Now, that was not the Jesus that the Peter wanted. He wanted the Christ of his own imagining. In fact, the Son of Man that the majority of the Church of his day wanted was a different Christ than the One of Scripture. So, Jesus bluntly and directly rebukes Peter. (Be careful of the Jesus you want. Hear the Word regularly in its context in order to ensure the Jesus you know is the Jesus of the Scripture, and not one of pop-Christianity, revisionist biblical liberals, law-bound fundamentalists, and so forth).

In spite of human imaginings, Jesus knows His Mission. He knows where His glory is to be most fully revealed. So, He teaches again that He is coming in His glory to be put to death for sinners. In addition, He calls out that His followers should follow in the path of His glory by carrying their own crosses!

So, a lot happened six days before the Transfiguration of our Lord. He used everything that occurred to teach His disciples. Even the Peter hears that his confession of Jesus meant that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die and be resurrected.

Now, after six days, Jesus leads the Peter, with the brothers, James and John, to witness a miraculous event. The Transfiguration helps to tie, in the ears, hearts and minds of believers, Jesus' baptism and His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Now we come to the second question posed a couple of minutes ago: what were Jesus, Moses and Elijah discussing on the Mount of Transfiguration? This is what St. Matthew records:

*And behold! They appeared, Moses and Elijah speaking together with Him.*<sup>5</sup>

That is all that the Evangelist/Apostle Matthew records. He goes on immediately to Peter's reaction to the gathering of the representative of the Old Covenant Torah (or Law) and the Old Covenant prophets all of which all testify to the Christ. The Peter sees them all as equal. His plan displays an intent to act on the

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16:21.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 17:3.

understanding that men should come to this now Holy Mountain to hear from Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter wanted to establish a place of worship, right there....

But that does not answer the question now posed again. What were Jesus, Moses and Elijah discussing? Another way to phrase that is this: What is the point of Jesus' Transfiguration as shown from the witness of the Law and the Prophets?

I would not ask those questions in a sermon if the answers were not given in the Word of God. We don't want to be led down a rabbit trail into speculation now. Let us use Jesus' method of biblical interpretation. We shall use Scripture to interpret Scripture so that we do not get a Jesus of our own imaginings or desires, but hear of the Christ Jesus of the Scriptures. We shall follow the command of the Voice from heaven and hear the Word. It declares, in St. Luke's parallel account of this day's text:

*And behold! Two men were speaking together with Him, who (in their) being were Moses and Elijah, the ones appearing in glory; they were speaking of the way out of Him which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>*

Ahh... Jesus' "way out" of this mortal life in glory was going to be completed in Jerusalem. My goodness! Within a week, that which Jesus told the Peter and other disciples He was about to do in Jerusalem is now witnessed to in the conversation between Him and Moses and Elijah. The same man who had been rebuked by Jesus for trying to prevent Him from going to death and resurrection, is now hearing it as a reality in the conversation of the representatives of the Old Covenant Law and Prophets. James and John would have heard, or by now known, of Jesus' correction of Simon Peter. They also again hear of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection witnessed to by the Word of God.

There was no need for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to hang around on the Mount of Transfiguration as Peter suggested. Moses, who had died and whose body God Himself had buried, was now before Jesus' chose eyewitnesses, alive. Elijah, who had never died but had been caught up into heaven in the chariots of fire, was now before Jesus' chose eyewitnesses, alive.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:31.

One of the teaching points of the Transfiguration events was to get Jesus' disciples to see the cross that was coming for the Christ. They were to behold it through the testimony of those gone from earth many centuries beforehand. In men whom the Peter, James and John could not have recognized from any paintings or graven images (they were still forbidden then), knew Moses and Elijah for who they were – alive in Jesus the Christ! (That is good news for all who fall asleep in Christ)!

Jesus binds them in this knowledge. He declares to them,

*To no one all of you may have told the vision until when the Son of Man from (the) deads may be raised...<sup>7</sup>*

You have heard of Jesus' disciples fear on that Holy Mountain. You have heard His command. If He had not died and been raised, all of that would likely have passed away and none of it come into your ears this day. That means that Jesus did fulfill the glory that was revealed on the mountain. He completed the testimony of Moses and Elijah by taking the way out of this sin-filled life in Jerusalem. He delivered Himself into the hands of sinners, that your sins might be carried away forever.

That you know, because God has made you faithful to His command, "*All of you must continue to hear Him.*" You hear him through the Word of Moses and Elijah. You hear Him through the Word of the Peter, James and John (and other eyewitnesses who were taught immediately by Jesus). That is how you may continue to fulfill the Father's command, as the Letter we call II Peter declares:

*And we have more certain the prophetic word, of which (it is) good to continually hold the mind to, as (a) lamp shining in (a) murky place, until when(the) day shines through and (the) morning star rises in the hearts of all of you...<sup>8</sup>*

In short, Jesus' glory is seen in His Word. That is what this feast day is all about. You are free to behold Jesus where He and all of Scripture testifies Him to be – in, with and under the Word proclaimed and visible.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 17:9.

<sup>8</sup> II Peter 1:19.

# The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Transfiguration (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 2; Exodus 34:29-35; II Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

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***Soli Deo Gloria***

*Jesus was metamorphosized before them, and His Face shone as the sun, and His garments became white as the light.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> *Matthew 17:2.*