

## **Sermon    February 14, 2021    The Transfiguration of our Lord    Mark 9:2-9**

Grace mercy and peace be unto you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we have the account of Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus' disciples Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to this event. In the transfiguration, Jesus revealed to these three disciples his heavenly, divine glory which was displayed in a bright light. The reading says this took place on top of a high mountain. The traditional location for the transfiguration is Mt. Tabor, which is about 2000 feet high and located about seven or eight miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Today, the Church of the Transfiguration stands on top of the mountain, and the walled-in buildings and property are divided between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

Jesus and his crew were up on Mt. Tabor to pray. As at Gethsemane, Peter, James, and John fell asleep and Jesus did most of the praying that night. The time came for Jesus to give the disciples a glimpse of his divine glory. His clothes turned a pure white. This was unusual and pointed out by Peter because in those times and places, white clothes were a rarity. Jesus was also enveloped in a cloud-like bright light. To top it off, Moses and Elijah appeared in the cloud and started to talk with Jesus about his passion, death, and resurrection – Jesus "Exodus."

Imagine being fast asleep in the middle of the night and then waking up to Jesus surrounded by this bright light and seeing Moses and Elijah there with Jesus! It would take a while to come to our senses. It was the same with Peter. The best he could come up with was the proposal to quickly put up three tents – one for each of the transfigured figures. Where they would get the canvas or tanned skins, rope, poles, and stakes is one question. How they would race down the mountain, acquire the gear, and get back up top again before the party was over is another. Peter was obviously talking out of his head because of his surprise.

Finally, the Father speaks from within the light, *“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”* What was the meaning of the brilliant white clothes, the light, and the visit by Moses and Elijah? It was to impress upon these three disciples the reality of who Jesus really was. Just as the Father said, all these things pointed to the truth that Jesus was indeed the Son of God!

What does all this mean for us today? Lots of things. First, we see that things have stayed pretty much the same over the millennia. As people fall asleep during sermons and during prayer, so the same back in Jesus day. That doesn't make it right! When we are engaging with the Lord, how important to stay sharp and not drift off into other thoughts or worse yet sleep. Also, when we stay spiritually awake through constant worship, study, and prayer, we will be much less likely to be taken by surprise when unusual things happen and we will be in less of a position to sense something nonsensical like Peter did. Follow the pattern I always recommend: Weekly worship, daily prayer, and constant love. Doing that will keep you “frosty” as they say in the military -meaning always on the watch and ready for anything.

This account also speaks a word to reincarnation. I can't count the times I come into contact with ideas of reincarnation. This idea has been around since time immemorial, and is as popular today as ever, or even more. Top universities are even doing studies on the matter. What is our answer? Remember who appeared with Jesus up top the mountain? Right. Moses and Elijah. They did not come back in another body as a new person. Elijah had been a prophet almost a thousand years before Jesus and Moses was another five hundred years back. One would think that, according to the principles of reincarnation, Moses and Elijah would have long been reincarnated. Perhaps Elijah came back as a housewife and Moses as a pharmaceutical rep. Nope. They were still them. Just in another realm. This really throws a lot of ice water on the popular idea of reincarnation. Keep that in mind as you talk to people and see articles, books, and shows on the topic.

The issue isn't reincarnation, but incarnation - the reality of God-in-the-flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Peter was worried about setting up tents. In actuality it is Jesus who, as the Bible says, had already started dwelling in a human body. The Bible refers to Jesus' body as a tent. That is how it pictures Jesus dwelling on earth. It's also a good practice for us disciples to worry less about our own body/ tents and satisfying all its desires, cravings, and other wants and instead look to pleasing Jesus who took on the tent of his human flesh to save us. As we are baptized into Christ and receive his body and blood, we take shelter in Jesus as our tent, our shelter against God's judgement. One day we will transition from that tent to God's mansion in his new kingdom. How wonderfully God provides shelter for us both now and forever!

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to see his glory. The Lord also promises to take us up a mountain. Not Mt. Tabor, but up to the mountain of the Lord. As he says through the prophet Micah, *"...and many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."* What a day that will be! The disciples beheld Jesus' glory in the cloud of light at the top of the mountain. Jesus promises that we will be gathered together up into the clouds to meet Jesus and behold his glory.

There's one more thing to point out today. We remember the Father speaking up there in the mist of the cloud of glory, *"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."* This is not just a nice, pithy saying. It is a direct command to all of Jesus' disciples. This has always been the mind of the Lord and always will be. God commands that we keep to the truths that Jesus teaches regarding reincarnation and all the rest. He also commands that we do everything Jesus instructs us to do like loving our neighbor as ourselves, to consider them to be even more important than ourselves, and to be willing to make costly personal sacrifices to live in harmony with others rather than let our own tastes, likes and dislikes become an obstacle or barrier to peaceful and harmonious relationships with fellow Christians.

Just because the Lord sets the bar so high does not in any way mean we should just give up on it, not even try to grow towards it, and slide by on cheap grace. Lent begins in three days. It is the most powerful time of the year for us to rededicate ourselves to a life of fervent faith and faithful service. Lent begins with the ashes of repentance. As we receive the ashes, we admit we are sinners and God's curse of death upon us is just. We also whole-heartily flee from those same iniquities and seek once again to purge them from our life. Certainly not completely, but more than before. Lent is also a time to purge those evils that have snuck back into our lives since last year, like foul language, unholy thoughts, neglect of a responsibility, needless despair, and the like. We do all this for the same reason Jesus lived carefully – to glorify our Father in heaven. We also seek this for our lives so that we do not slide back into a life of weak faith, faulty faith, or no faith. It is for our own good. After all, who in their right minds would want to miss the pleasures of life eternal and would not want it for others, too?

God bless us as we conclude the current season of Epiphany with all its glorious light and move into the solemn days of Lent to repent and to be renewed in our faith and life. Amen.

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