

Transfiguration 2/26/17  
Matthew 17:1-9 A

HE WAS STILL SPEAKING WHEN, BEHOLD, A BRIGHT CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THEM, AND A VOICE FROM THE CLOUD SAID, "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED; LISTEN TO HIM".

When Jesus and the disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked them, "Who do you say that I am" (v. 15)? Peter answered for all of them, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

Sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? Sure it does. Because you have been in the same place as the disciples. When you were baptized and later on, when you were confirmed, you were asked by the pastor that same question, "Who is Jesus? What do you believe about Jesus?" "I believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God". That was your answer at both your baptism and your confirmation, and then you got your picture taken with Grandma and had cake.

Maybe that was to ease your discomfort because to everyone who confesses Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus has these words,

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Self-denial. Cross bearing. Losing your life for Jesus's sake.

Doesn't sound like a lot of fun, does it? What about you being # 1? What about you being the master of your own destiny? You deserve it your way,

don't you? You love ease and following Jesus sounds like a lot of hard work; a very difficult thing to do.

But, you have. You have confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, as Peter did. And as you do follow Jesus, you have been called to a life of self-denial. Cross bearing. Losing your life for the sake of Jesus.

And, this is the life Peter, James, and John, and all the disciples had been pondering for six days. You can almost read their thoughts, can't you -- What did we get ourselves into? What is all this about denying yourself and bearing a cross?

As they are thinking about these things and what they are going to do about them, something marvelous happens. Jesus leads them up a high mountain and He is transfigured before them. And, holy cow, what sight it is to behold – His face shining like the sun, His clothes as white as light. And, He's not alone up there. There's Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. There He is in all His divine glory. What an incredible sight to behold, so much so that Peter says, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah".

It makes sense to talk like that, if you think about it? This following Jesus sounds more like a death march than a journey on the yellow brick road. You have to wonder -- What am I going to have to give up to follow Jesus? How much of a hard struggle is this life of following Jesus going to be for me?

Peter saw the glory on that mountain and He wants that glory. That's a whole lot better than denying yourself, bearing a cross, losing your life for

Jesus' sake. Just by building a couple of tents, we can stay here and make this last forever. Wouldn't you want that?

Sure ya would, because you know what it's like to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. You know what it's like to take a stand for Jesus and you know what happens when you do. Like at the coffee shop when gossip comes up at the table and mean, vicious things are being said about your neighbor, but you defend your neighbor. Or, when you're in the break room at work and someone tells an off-color joke and the room erupts in laughter, but you don't laugh. Or, when your buddy at school wants to copy your work and you say no. Or, when you say abortion stops a beating heart. You know what it's like to take a stand for Jesus. Your friends, family, co-workers, classmates – those that you want to love you – won't love you because you are one of those Jesus people.

If you can avoid all that rejection and hurt, and bask in the glory of God just by building a tent, you'd do that, wouldn't you?

But, God has a different idea. As Peter is making his building plans, the bright cloud overshadows everyone and a voice says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him".

Listen to Him. Listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, and as you do, God will give you all you need to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

Listen to Him because He has a lot to say to you. Chiefly, He blazed a trail for you. That's what He did when He took up His cross and carried it all the way to Calvary. There, upon that wooden rod of torture, He was once again transfigured. His face went from the glory of the mount of transfiguration to a face covered with dirt, bruises, and blood.

There upon that cross, once again, His body is transfigured as His life-blood flows from His hands, His feet, His side. Upon that cross, He is transfigured from life to death, because He is bearing all your sin and all the punishment that you deserve, as He gives His life as the sacrifice for your sins.

You are united into that death of Good Friday and the glory of Easter morning when you were baptized. There you heard God's voice, "This is my beloved Son, my beloved Daughter, with whom I am well pleased". He began His good work in you and you began your walk of faith. As you walk the journey of faith, listen to Him.

Listen to Him when friends, family, co-workers, classmates ridicule and reject you for following Jesus. Listen to Him for He says this to you,

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12).

When you are walking on that journey and the going gets tough, because it is a daily struggle to deny yourself and bear your cross, listen to Him, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

If you feel lonely and left out because you follow Jesus, listen to Him, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:18-21).

As you walk on that journey, He will manifest Himself to you in His body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He will

manifest Himself to you as He speaks His words of pardon and peace and encouragement into your ears. He will manifest Himself to you to give you all that you need to sustain you so that you can deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him, all the way until that day you see Jesus and Moses and Elijah in all their glory, forever and ever, without end. You can be sure of that because the One who calls upon you to bear your cross is the One who bore His cross for you.