

Transfiguration 2020
Matthew 17:1-9 A

“LORD, IT IS GOOD THAT WE ARE HERE”

45 degrees the truck said yesterday. And, I should emphasize that is 45 ABOVE degrees. So much better than some weather we’ve had this time of year.

Sunny or cold, windy or warm, we remember that we are strangers here and heaven is our home. Truly, where we long to be is in heaven – because that is where Jesus is. The celebration of Transfiguration assures us and comforts us that, like Moses and Elijah alive on the mountain with Jesus, we will forever with Jesus.

What had happened before the Transfiguration was this. Immediately before going up on the mountain with Peter, John, and James, Jesus had been alone with His disciples. He had asked them: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They gave a variety of answers.

Then, Jesus put the question to the disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered for all of them, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And the Evangelist Matthew tells us Jesus blessed him, saying that this confession was not just some mere opinion of flesh and blood, some learned opinion, some deep religious feeling, but the Father in Heaven had made His Son known to Peter and the apostles.

Then Matthew continues, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”. At these words of our Lord, Peter, whose faith had just shown itself in his great confession of faith, forgot his faith. Matthew continues, “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from

you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! ... 6For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Then begins our Gospel: "And after six days – six days after Peter’s confession -- Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them". His appearance changed. By nature, He is God, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God." In this earthly life, his divinity was hidden under human flesh and bone. But at His Transfiguration, these three disciples saw a small measure of the glory of God, when the glory of His divine nature shone through His human flesh. On the transfiguration mount, the disciples saw the truth of Peter’s confession – this is the Christ, the Son of God. And, they saw a foretaste of the feast of heaven to come. For but a brief moment, they were privileged to see with their own eyes what we will see with our own eyes forever and ever, without end.

So, I guess you really can’t blame Peter, "Lord, if it good to be here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah". I once had a guy say to me, "Pastor, a bad day fishing is better than any day of work". Obviously, he liked to fish, but that’s the sentiment Peter was expressing. Why go down that mountain, to the dusty roads of Palestine and Roman soldiers? Oh, to be on that beach, the golf course, the boat, and not have to deal with the thorns and thistles, the troubles and tears of this present age.

Like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, we wander through the dangers and perils of the wilderness of this present age. We are burdened by sin, weighed down by griefs and woes, filled with fear and regret, longing to know: where is God?

The Law does that to you. The Law always accuses. The Law always beats you down. The Law shows you your failures and faults, your sins. The Law brings only death.

The Law cannot save us. It only condemns us. Paul says it this way, “for by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Ro 3:20). If we only had the Law, we would be forever driven from the presence of the Lord and lost forever.

But, there are more words of the Lord than Law. In the verses before our Old Testament lesson begins, we read that Moses “built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar”. Then begins the words of our Old Testament, “And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words”.

In order for the sinful people of God to come into His presence there must be a sacrifice and the shedding of blood, because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”.

All the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the One sacrifice for the sins of the world when, on the altar of the cross, Jesus was crucified. Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world at Bethlehem for you, to bear your burden of sin, disease, and death; your shame, your regret, your heartache, your sorrow to the place of sacrifice. He was nailed

to the cross where His blood was shed for the forgiveness of all your sins. That is the good news of the Gospel.

God came to Moses on the mountain; God came to Peter, James, and John on the Transfiguration mount; and He comes to us today and distributes the forgiveness, life, and salvation Jesus won to you, so that it may be your very own. God the Father directs us to Jesus, "Listen to Him". "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," Jesus says (Jn 10).

Listen to Jesus. Here, in the worship services of God's House, you hear him declare, "I baptized you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," there, you hear me adopt you as my own child. Hear Him, "I forgive you all of your sins, in the Absolution, giving you the victory He won on the cross. Hear Him, "This is My body, this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins". By these means, the Lord is with us and we are in His presence. That is why it is so good to be here.

"Tis good, Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain;
But since Thou bidst us leave the mount, come with us to the plain". As Peter, James, and John had to go down the mountain to the plain, so we leave this mountaintop of our worship together to go to the plain, our every day lives, families, work, activities. Even then, we can rejoice and be comforted, because just as Jesus went with Peter, James, and John to the plain, He comes with us to the plain, wherever we are in this valley of the shadow of death.

There is nothing glorious sitting in the ICU ward, when your loved one lies on the hospital bed and you are helpless to do anything. There is nothing glorious in coming home at the end of a long day to see your spouse from whom you departed in words of anger that morning. There's

nothing glorious for a child growing up in a home where he/she is belittled and called cruel names. There's nothing glorious about illness and disease, families, friendships [and congregations] torn apart by sin.

Listen to Him say, "I am with you always" (Mt 28). "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (He 13). "Because I live, you also will live" (Jn 14). His rod and His staff do comfort you.

You are on the plain. But it is good to be here, because the Lord is with you here. And because He is with you here, you know the mountaintop of heaven awaits you. As He was transfigured to demonstrate His Godhead on the mountain, so He will also transform you from a dying body to a resurrected body forever. The glory is not seen yet, but it is yours in Jesus.