

Transfiguration, 2006

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

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XGrace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ X

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Behold a reason to rejoice, dear Christians. That is what is presented to us in the Gospel lesson today. For look who stands with Christ on the mountain of transfiguration: Moses, Elijah, and Peter, James and John. If they may stand with Christ in his glory, then there is yet hope for you as well. Or do you not recall that Moses once murdered an Egyptian? He felt the exciting tingle of self-righteous anger as he pounded the life out of that guard and left him to rot in the desert sands. Yes, Moses was a murderer, a sinner against the fifth commandment – and worse, for he was a doubter of God and his power, sinning against the first and greatest commandment. For that day when he struck the rock with his staff he trusted in his own powers, he was his own God – for the true God had not commanded the miracle in that way. And thus Moses died outside of the promised land.

And Elijah? Some hero of the faith that one! Even after God had shown Elijah his power against the prophets of Baal, it was poor old Elijah who threw himself a pity party, weeping to God that he alone was left, no one was faithful but him, and now wicked Ahab and Jezebel were coming for his life too. O Elijah of little faith, how small you must have felt when God told you that there were yet seven thousand in Israel who had not bent the knee to Baal.

And then Peter, if this crumbling rock is the best the Apostles have to offer it does not speak well for Apostles. He has been known to rebuke Jesus, draw swords in anger, disbelieve the testimony of the resurrection witnesses and deny the Gospel altogether against St. Paul. James and John, the other two apostles blessed with this Transfiguration experience, fair no better than Peter, their hapless leader – indeed they once tried to do an end round past Peter to get the good sits in the Kingdom of God, and they didn't even have to guts to do it themselves, they sent Mommy to Jesus to do the asking.

Moses, Elijah, Peter and James and John - sinners all, and big ones too. See in them your own sins: Moses for the anger you've used against your spouse, Elijah for the doubt you've had toward God, Peter for the arrogance when you have thought yourself so much better than this friend or that family member, James and John for the jealousy you feel for what your neighbor has in either her possessions or her

relationships. Yes, look at these weak sinners and see your reflection – and then repent and then rejoice.

Repent, turn away from wrath and jealousy and doubt. Turn away from these things and instead cast your cares and trust on God. For look – our Lord and God Jesus Christ is pleased to have these sinner stand with him, in the flesh, on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Look at this and rejoice! Do not stand away from this Jesus either because you think you are too good for him, or because you think he is too good for you. He is surpassingly good, no doubt, but he is good toward you, for your sake.

Moses and Elijah and Peter, James and John stand with him by grace, by Jesus' good will. They don't stand here because Jesus just ignores their sin. God is not some indulgent grandpa in the sky who winks at his children with a sly grin when they do wrong. God is not like us. He is Holy. He abhors sin and cannot stand its presence. Sin is everything God isn't and he cannot abide its evil stench. But still these sinners stand with Jesus. Somehow they are made right with God. But how?

The answer is found in the prophecies made by Moses and Elijah and in the Gospel preached by Peter, James and John. For didn't Moses write that the Seed of the Woman would come who would crush Satan's head and death and sin with him? Didn't he tell the story of an innocent Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the people – dying in their place? And surely Elijah the Tishbite proclaimed what Jesus would do when he provided a fitting sacrifice which the LORD received and thereby destroyed the servants of the Evil One. And foolish Peter found his way and says to you today, "You were bought at a price – not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish." And beloved John reminds us that Jesus is the propitiation of our sins, the great Lamb of God whose death fulfills and makes obsolete all Temple sacrifice.

Yes, these sinners learned their lesson well. They learned to turn away from any hope in themselves and turn toward this Jesus – the one who came to lay down his life for them. Yes, God is Holy – and he is merciful. He loves you with an everlasting love and takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Rather, he takes pleasure in saving sinners. But that must come at a price, for he is holy still and there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. Sin may not just be ignored. A price must be paid – look to the cross of Christ therefore to see with what currency your debt was leveled: the bitter sufferings and innocent death of your Lord Jesus Christ has sealed your place in the kingdom of God, for God the Father loves you so much that he send his Son to die for you, and for his sake forgives you all your sins.

This is what makes it possible for these sinners to stand in the glory of Christ: he is there to die for them. Already in the Old Testament

the people of God looked forward to the coming Messiah who would save them from their sins – the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Thus even before the Lord accomplished his saving sacrifice on the cross, that sacrifice covered Moses and Elijah, and Peter, James and John. For to God all times are one – and thus the sacrifice of our Lord covers not only some sins, but the sins of the whole world, of all peoples, of all times and places.

And how much more does this sacrifice of Christ cover you, dear Christian? For you have every advantage over Moses and Elijah and Peter, James and John. They lived in shadows – at first catching only glimpses of their salvation in Christ. But you have the benefit of hindsight, of being born in these latter days. Where Moses and Elijah had to be content with remembering the Red Sea crossing, you have that crossing's fulfillment in your Baptism. That watery grave of Baptism is your entrance into the Kingdom of God. Where Elijah had to be content with gathering around a Passover meal once a year to look forward to the Lamb of God who would come and take away his sins, you actually get to receive the true Lamb of God in his true body and blood in the holy mystery of the Lord's Supper, which causes the Angel of Death to pass over your door.

So rejoice Christian. All these gifts are yours. Do not cling to this world therefore – it has no such gifts to offer. Its gifts are lies and shadows and last only a moment and then fade away into memories of regret. Leave such vanities and instead cling to the realities, the holy gifts of Christ which usher you in to eternal life. Learn to know the joy St. Peter had – he wanted to stay on that mountain and continue to commune with the Lord Jesus alongside Moses and Elijah. That was a good idea born from the joy of a true Christian heart. But Jesus had something better in mind. Not just one mountain where five or six or a thousand could have the closest union with him – that would never do. Jesus has in mind a communion with him that is just as real, just as enfleshed, as this encounter on the mountain, yet one that would allow all the people of God on earth to join with Moses, and Elijah and all the company of heaven, lauding and magnifying his glorious Name as they receive the fullness of Jesus. Yes, Christians, this altar is the place Jesus had in mind. Right here, right now. This is why Jesus walked down off the mountain and toward the cross and up from the dead again. He wanted you to have the joy Peter sought: continued union with the person of Jesus Christ coming to you in his incarnation, his body and blood. Is there any better place to be than at the Lord's Table? Is there any closer communion with him? Oh, dear friends in Christ, learn to say with St. Peter: It is good to be here. It is good to receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, to have this incredible union with him that cannot but bring us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. It is good to be here indeed.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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