



TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS
FEBRUARY 14/15, 2015

FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
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Exodus 3:1-15; Matthew 16:21-17:8

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Recently Carolyn and I had our granddaughter, Sophia, stay with us for the weekend. It was a great experience, we had a lot of **fun** – *and* we were both fairly exhausted by the time we took her home! Having a two-and-a-half-year-old around like that is a good reminder of **why** God gives children to be cared for...to people who are *much younger!*

I took Sophie along on an errand, and she, of course, asked, *Where we going, Poppa?* I explained that we were going to the **store**. She asked, *Where is it?* I said, *In town.* **Then**, of course, she asked, *Why?*...and I dutifully explained... Two minutes of silence passed, then Sophie asked, *Where we going, Poppa?*

In the end, **none** of my answers could satisfy Sophie's questions: the **name** of the store, a **description** of it, its **purpose**, **size**, **color of paint**, **map coordinates**...**none** of that could help her...because she'd never **been** to that store. The **journey** we were on was a **mystery** to her...

The journey of the **disciples** with **Jesus** has just turned into a mystery that **blows** them **away**. At this time in his ministry, **Jesus** is at the **top** of his game:

-he draws huge crowds wherever he goes,

-the sick are being healed,

-he's *comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable*...

and the disciples are *loving* it – they **know** that **Jesus** is the **One** who will establish God's kingdom on earth – and **they** are the *inner circle*.

But as you heard in our passage from Matthew 16 – Jesus has just finished throwing a big ol' wet blanket on the disciples' plans for fame

and fun. He tells them: his **life** will **soon come** to a bitter and painful end...

They were **cruising** along, **helping** folks **out**, **giving** people **hope**... when all of a sudden **BAM!** they find themselves in a twilight zone, some alternate universe where things are turned upside down and inside out...and **now** they don't have a **clue** of *where* to *go*, or *what* to *do*...

Peter is so confused and upset that he **pulls Jesus aside** and says, *God forbid it, Lord – this must never happen to you!*... And **that** makes Jesus utter his harshest sentence in the bible – *Get behind me, Satan!* – he says this to his right-hand man, his friend...

Then he turns to the **rest** of his disciples and tells them **all** that **God's** path through life is about *dying to self*, and living for God and neighbor.

As I said in the announcements – **this is** one of the most **difficult** passages in the New Testament – **harder**, in some ways, even than the **crucifixion** story.

The **disciples** thought they'd figured out where they were going. They'd left their businesses, families, neighbors and friends... They had committed their lives to teaching, preaching and helping people in need - **all** so that, truly, *God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven*...

I imagine it was a **somber**...**silent**...**saddened** group that, six days later, climbed the mountain with Jesus. If the **glory** they had **imagined** will end in **despair** then, they must have wondered, where in the world are they going and why???

I can **also** imagine the depth of the disciples' **distress** when the events of this experience we call the Transfiguration start to unfold. **Suddenly**, this friend with whom they had lived, this rabbi with whom they had walked the country, this man whom they thought they knew so well...

...*changes*...

His **face** *shines like the sun*

His **clothes** *start to glow*

Two **giants** of the **faith** (dead for centuries) appear and *speak with him*

A **bright cloud** *overshadows them*...

Then the **voice of God** *BOOMS at them*...

They fall to the ground, **scared** out of their **wits**...

And I don't blame them!

Jesus has **shaken** their **world** to its **foundation** by saying that soon he will be: betrayed, abused and killed, that their life together – as they know it – will soon come to a **terrible** end.

And yet **here** they see him **shining** with the very **light** of God's glory. Plus he's **standing** right there with *Moses* to his left and *Elijah* to his right. And then **God** – **God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth**, *that* God speaks...to Peter, James and John – (even though they sometimes **act** more like *Moe, Larry and Curly!!!*).

This is my beloved son...says God...listen to him!

I'm pretty certain that you and I will never experience such a manifestation of **God's holiness** as we go about our day-to-day lives. I'm also pretty certain that we will never experience such a shaking of our foundation as did the disciples when Jesus fell from *popular preacher* to *crucified criminal* to *risen savior*...

But the **truth** is that we're **all** on the same journey as Peter, James and John. And as Jesus promised to be present with **them**, so the Lord promises to be **present** with *us*. They needed to witness this spectacular event – both to **endure** the *difficult days ahead*, **and** to **prepare** for an *incredible calling* – one that would take this good news known by just a handful of ordinary men and women, and **spread** it *throughout* the *world* like the **wind** crossing **barriers, boundaries and borders**.

No, you and I won't experience *that* kind of sign...but **God** has **not forgotten** us either. In **fact**, we've been given **many** signs to help us in our journey of faith – and they're all right here: prayer and fellowship, the Lord's Supper and Baptism, God's Word and songs of praise, the Manger and the Cross.

At the end of their *wholly* holy experience on the mountain, the disciples fall **flat** on their **faces** for **fear**. **They don't understand** what's going on – **they're** not even sure they'll **survive** the experience. But then Jesus comes to them, touches them, and says to them, *Do not be afraid*.

So there I am in the car with my granddaughter Sophie, doing my best to answer her questions in ways that she will understand...and then it finally **dawns** on me: she doesn't really **care** about my **answers** because she can't **understand** them anyway!

Asking questions without an understandable answer is an experience that would drive me crazy...but not her. **Do you know why?** Because she simply **trusted** me to get us to the store – whichever and wherever it was – **and** back home safely. What mattered to **her** was **not** the knowledge of the full plan, but the *assuring presence* of one who would be by her side – all the way to the end of the journey.

Sophie **asked** her questions, made me **look** at her in the rear-view mirror, **told** me about the stickers Grandma had given her, and **made** me sing a song – **all** of which I was happy to do. Because every little thing I did helped her feel secure in the middle of the journey, secure in the promise that we were together and that all would end well.

The **same** thing is true about **God** with **us** on our journey through life. As **Jesus touched** the disciples and **assured** them that they need not fear, **so** Jesus continues to touch **us** – through prayer and scripture, through the loving arms of family and the helping hands of neighbors, in

the Lord's Supper and Baptism, in the Manger, the Cross and the empty tomb...

God is here – for us – **forever**. **Hold fast** to that promise on your journey through life, and then, be **very generous** in sharing it with others. Amen.