

February 19, 2023 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

It is good for us to be here!

It proves that Jesus is our divine Savior

It prepares us for what is ahead

“I want you to see something,” motioned Jesus to Peter, James and John. The 3 disciples were puzzled. Just a week earlier, Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. Peter answered (16:16), “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” Now that they understood WHO he was, Jesus needed to teach them WHAT that meant, what was going to happen to him. He explained that he would suffer and die. Peter was afraid. Jesus was their leader. He told Jesus (16:22), “**Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you.**” Jesus snapped back (16:23), “**Get behind me, Satan!**” The other disciples were shocked and Peter was crushed. Jesus just called him Satan. That hurt. For the next week, Peter was in a sullen mood.

“I want you to see something,” and Peter, James and John started following Jesus up a nearby mountain. It was a long walk and their calf muscles burned with each step. The air got thin and breathing was labored. Finally, Jesus stopped and the 3 disciples dropped to the ground to rest. Jesus started praying and, all of a sudden, it seemed as if his face caught on fire, like the bright glow of the blast furnace at Charter Steel. His face was like the sun and his clothes were as white as light. It’s not just that he looked super clean wearing super white clothes. The word translated as “transfigured” is “metamorphosis.” That’s the term scientists use to describe what happens when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Jesus was changed. His normally hidden godly nature shined so brightly that they could barely tell that Jesus was still human. Then the disciples saw and heard Moses and Elijah – two heroes of the Old Testament – talking with Jesus. Peter blurted out (:4), “**Lord, it is good for us to be here.**” This morning as we take a closer look at the Transfiguration, we also will agree that it is good for us to be here.

It proves that Jesus is our divine Savior

Even though Jesus performed many miracles right in front of many people most refused to believe that he was God because he was so . . . human. He was born and grew up like any other Jewish boy. He walked and talked, got tired and slept. At Jesus’ baptism, the crowd heard God the Father give his testimony (3:17), “**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**” But the people could not understand how someone could be God and human at the same time, so they refused to believe Jesus was God. They put human logic above God’s Word. A lot of people still do that today. If they can not understand something in the Bible, they reject it. They reject

that baptism truly gives forgiveness and faith, even to infants. They reject that Jesus’ body and blood can be present in the Lord’s Supper. They reject that there is physical life after death. They rob themselves of such comfort and joy. How sad.

While Peter was blabbering, a bright cloud covered them. That’s the same cloud we saw in our first lesson from Exodus 24 – The Glory of the Lord. It appeared from time to time in the Old Testament when God wanted to prove to people that he was there. A voice from the cloud said (:5), “**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**” Those are the exact same words the Father spoke at Jesus’ baptism. So, a week earlier, when Peter said that Jesus was “**the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” he was right! Jesus is true God in the flesh. The transfiguration proves that Jesus is our divine Savior.

God is perfect and if we hope to live with him in heaven, we have to be perfect like him. Since we can not be perfect, Jesus lived a perfect life for us. Jesus could live that perfect life because he was true God. And in order for Jesus to give everyone in the history of the world credit for his perfect life, Jesus would need to be true God who is everywhere all the time. So, in order for Jesus to be our Savior, he had to be true God and the transfiguration proves, again, that Jesus is true God. It is good for us to be here on this Mount of Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration also proves to us that with Jesus, there truly is physical life after death. Moses and Elijah were not just holographic images floating around. Nor were Peter, James and John hallucinating in the higher altitude. When their life on earth was over, Moses and Elijah did not cease to exist. They were not just candles in the wind that got blown out. They were still alive. They simply exchanged their earthly body for a glorified heavenly body and changed their address. What a tremendous comfort for us to know that our loved ones in the Lord are not gone. They are happy and healthy and with Jesus. And when we die, we will join them. Yes, indeed, it is good for us to be here and see this.

When Jesus said that he was going to suffer and die, Peter was terribly troubled. Here on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus prepared him for what was ahead. His death would not be the end. The Transfiguration also prepares us for what is ahead.

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When Peter blurted out (:4), “**Lord, it is good for us to be here.**” he had the wrong idea in his mind. Peter was so excited about seeing Jesus in his full glory that he did not ever want it to leave. He wanted to build three tents for

Jesus, Moses and Elijah so they could stay at the top of that mountain and Peter and others could leave the wicked world behind with its problems and pains, struggles and sorrows. He could enjoy God's glory all the time. I think we can all sympathize with Peter. We would like a bit of heaven on this earth. We all would like it if we could escape all our problems and pains. Wouldn't that be great? Just like Peter, we want the glory and we want it now. We want a heaven on earth. That's not our reality, though, is it? It is easy for our sinful nature to get us frustrated and discouraged with Jesus. He's not doing what we want him to do. He is not giving us the happy and healthy life we want. We are not getting our way. We complain. We grumble. We grouse. We must sound like whining two-year old children to God. He would have every right to say, "You don't like the way I'm running the world? You can spend eternity apart from me."

Jesus did not let Peter build three tents and he did not stay in his glorified state at the top of the mountain. He went back down the mountain and began his final walk to Jerusalem. Yes, he gave his disciples a glimpse of his divine glory, but that wasn't his purpose for coming to earth. Jesus came to fulfill God's promise of salvation by suffering and dying for us. That certainly hurt, but in the process, he crushed the devil's ability to drag you into hell with him. By giving his disciples a glimpse of his glory he was letting them know, "You are going to see some ugly and terrible things happen to me. You are going to see me die. It's going to look like I lost and it's all over. I want you to remember that I am God who is in control of life and death. Do not panic. Do not worry. Do not doubt. Trust in me." He was preparing them for what was ahead.

When Peter tried to deter Jesus from suffering and dying, he was suggesting exactly what the devil wanted. The devil did not want Jesus to save the world and that's why Jesus called Peter Satan. Jesus could have said to Peter, "If you have the same mindset as the devil, then you can spend eternity with him." Jesus, however, did not punish Peter. Jesus gently approached those 3 disciples, gently place his hand on them and said (:8), "**Don't be afraid.**" Jesus was not going to punish Peter and he's not going to punish you. That's why Jesus went down the mountain and started walking toward Jerusalem and the cross. He paid for the sins of the whole world and that includes you! You are already forgiven.

The Transfiguration also prepares us for what is ahead. We are reminded that over the next 6 weeks of Lent, we are going to see Jesus suffer and die. Jesus told us that if he suffered, then we – his followers – can also expect to suffer on this earth. We are reminded that we are not going to get to enjoy a constantly glorious time on this earth. Certainly, it's great when have those wonderful and happy moments like birthdays, graduations and anniversaries.

But those moments are only momentary. Health problems, crazy issues in our country, finances, etc. are going to continue to bother us. We can not escape that, but we do not despair. We do not think that God is punishing us. We do not get discouraged. We know that this is only temporary. Yes, Jesus would suffer and die. That's the only way he could be our Savior, but in verse 9 he also reminded Peter, James and John that he would also rise victoriously and then go to heaven where we will one day go and enjoy his full glory without end. We will walk and talk with Jesus just like Moses and Elijah did.

I like to think of our church, and especially the chancel up front here, as a mini Mount of Transfiguration. The same blessing that Jesus gave his disciples through the Transfiguration, he gives to us here in this building dedicated to his glory, this holy house of prayer. Jesus' glory is here just like it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, but it's hidden. Jesus' glory is revealed in the gospel – the good news of salvation through Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. That glory is hidden behind the stumbling words of a sinful preacher and behind the simplistic forms water and wheat and wine. Every time we come into contact with the gospel, our faith is refreshed, even if we do not feel a warm fuzzy in our heart. It is good for us to be here.

Here, in church, the Lord touches us with more than just the sight and sound of a video screen. Here, we build each other up in the faith as we proclaim the gospel to each other in liturgy and song. Here, we sing stronger and encourage each other more. Here, we have a stronger sense of community as we support each other as we talk and show loving concern for each other. Here, Jesus gives us his own body and blood to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. Here, all of our senses are engaged as we feel the organ vibrate the pews, and as we smell and taste the bread and wine. It is good for us to be here.

After endorsing Jesus, the Father's last words to the disciples were (:5), "**Listen to him.**" That's the best advice we could ever get. Hang on to Jesus. Connect with his Word every day. Worship as often as possible. Do not blow off Wednesday night Lenten worship. If you have not come before, you do not know what you are missing. Come and show Jesus how much you love him as he blesses you even more. Look beyond the sorrow and sadness of life on earth to the glory revealed in the gospel and the glory that we will share in heaven. And when, by God's grace, we arrive in heaven, we will shout with overwhelming joy, "It is good for us to be here." Amen.