

Sermon for The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Date: March 3, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Epistle Reading: Hebrews. 3:1-6

Gospel Reading: Luke 9:28-36

Sermon Text: Luke 9:28-36

Sermon Title: In a Whole New Light



Introit: Psalm 84:1-2, 9, 11; Antiphon Psalm 84:4

Hymns:

LSB 414 – 'Tis Good Lord to Be Here

LSB 413 – O Wondrous Type! O Vision Fair

LSB 417 – Alleluia, Song of Gladness

Distribution:

LSB 617 – O Lord, We Praise Thee

LSB 621 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau



Text: Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him and went up a mountain to pray. While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him. They appeared in heavenly glory and were discussing Jesus' approaching death and what he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.

Peter and the men with him were very sleepy. When they were fully awake they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Teacher, it is good that we are here. Let us put up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter didn't know what he was saying.

While he was saying this a cloud overshadowed them. They were frightened as they went into the cloud. A voice came out of the cloud and said, "This is my Son, My chosen One. Listen to him!"

After the voice had spoken they saw that Jesus was alone. The disciples said nothing, and for some time they told no one about what they had seen.

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Grace, peace, and mercy to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

I think it's safe to say that on this day, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in a whole new light! Certainly according to who Jesus really is. Think about it, how could someone see such a sight and not think differently about Jesus?

The scene before Peter, James, and John, and us today, includes:

- Jesus appearing in His divine glory,
- the visit of Moses and Elijah,
- the cloud,
- and the voice of the Father.

All of that doesn't just tell us about who Jesus is. It is also telling us something about what He has come to do. It is telling us something about His work. It is telling us something about what He was going to accomplish, in Jerusalem, in the very near future. As we see Jesus here, in a whole new light, we know that we have a God on whom we can count. Not a God of glory who is far away, but a God of glory who is with us, and here for us. When life gets tough, and it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When life gets confusing and dark, and it's difficult to know which way to go. When life seem to fall short of what we think it should be. God is with us. God can be counted on to keep His promises. God can be trusted to ensure our eternal safety and salvation.

It is Moses and Elijah, in part, that help us understand that truth. They were there with Jesus for a reason. They weren't just the first two in Heaven to volunteer because the Father needed somebody from Heaven to appear with Jesus and guys like Able, David, and Isaiah were too slow to raise their hands! That's not how things work. It is exactly Moses and Elijah that help us understand the work that Jesus has come to do, and how He was going to accomplish it, and what that means for us. That is why Luke tells us that as the three of them stood there, they weren't just showing off their glory, they were talking. They were talking about the work that Jesus was about to accomplish: His departure, His exodus.

Now, of course, that's something Moses knew something about! As you might recall, it was Moses who led the people of Israel, in their exodus, out of Egypt. He was the one who led their rescue from the long, hard slavery and bondage. This was such a monumental event in the lives of God's people that it was rightly understood as the defining moment of their life.

Yet as great as Moses was (and as we heard, there was never another prophet as great as Moses¹) he could not finish the job. Leading the people into the Promised Land would be left to someone else, to Joshua. As great as this exodus was, it didn't last. The people eventually fell into slavery to sin again, and then slavery to the world through nations like the Assyrians, and the Babylonians. Another exodus would be required. A greater exodus. A permanent and lasting exodus. Jesus' exodus!

This is what Moses and Jesus were perhaps discussing that day. The last, final, and greater exodus, by the One greater than Moses. An exodus not from any oppression or slavery in this

1 Deuteronomy 34:10

world, but from the eternal oppression and slavery of sin and death. An exodus that would take place with Jesus' own sacrifice and death on the cross.

So exodus is something Moses knows something about, and sacrifice is something the prophet Elijah knew about! Specifically when Elijah stood alone in a contest of sacrifices against the 450 prophets of Baal.² When Elijah alone prayed for God to accept the sacrifice he offered. When Elijah alone interceded for a nation that had utterly abandoned God and His promises. When the fire of God came down, and consumed Elijah's sacrifice, and the altar it was on, and the ground all around it, and all of the water that had been poured over it. The fire of God that should have consumed the rebellious and sinful people, didn't. It consumed the sacrifice instead. A sacrifice offered in faith.

It was a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus on the altar of the cross. As Jesus hung alone with the sin of the whole world on Him. Alone interceding for a world that had utterly abandoned God and His promises. Alone against Satan and his minions. Jesus offered His life in our place, taking the fire of Hell, that we deserved, and being consumed by God's wrath instead of us.

What a conversation that must have been, taking place that day on that mountain! Not for Jesus' sake, but for the sake of Peter, James and John. ... and for us too. What Moses' exodus fell short of completion on the top of Mount Nebo,³ and what Elijah's sacrifice symbolized on the top of Mount Carmel,⁴ would now be accomplished once and for all by Jesus. Not here in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, but in humiliation and shame on a Mount called Galgatha.⁵

That is why the voice of the Father from the cloud that day says, "Listen to Him!"⁶ Because the glory is not in what you see, but in what you hear. The Word of God. Jesus' glory is greater than Moses', and greater than Elijah's, not because of the Transfiguration, but because of the cross. Because He was about to do what they could never do, what no one else could do. He was going to lay down His life for the life of the whole world. Lay down His life to forgive all your sins and defeat death for you. Lay down His life so that we can see God in a whole new light. That we would see His love, His strength, and His true glory. To know that the only God we can count on, is the God of the cross.

Just as in Moses' day, we today are slaves to sin. Just as in Elijah's day, there are false gods, and false prophets.

Of course, you know it doesn't work like that. Our sin is a slavery too strong, and the false promises of false gods, and false prophets, are just that, false. Promising life where there is only death. Promising happiness that only ends in eternal sorrow. Promising satisfaction that only leaves us craving more. Promising glory that never lasts, or never comes.

There is only One you can count on. Only One who does not demand your life, but instead gives you His. There is only One who does not lure you into sin, but instead forgives your sins. There is only One who does not wait for you to pull yourself up to Him, but instead comes

2 1 Kings 18:17-40

3 Deuteronomy 34:1

4 1 Kings 18:19

5 Matthew 27:33

6 Luke 9:35

down to you. There is only One who does not demand a pound of flesh and blood from you, but instead feeds you with His own flesh and blood. There is only One who promised to rescue you, and delivered on that promise. There is only One who does not leave you in the dark, but instead is the Light of the world. There is only One who does not leave you lost and confused, but instead sends His Spirit of wisdom and life. There is only One who knows this life will always fall short, and so has provided you a new eternal life.

There is only One. Greater than Moses and Elijah. Greater than you and me. Greater than sin, Satan, and death. The One who offered Himself on the altar of the cross. The One who leads us in our exodus, through the waters not of the Red Sea, but the waters of baptism, and not into the Promised Land of Canaan, but the Promised Land of Heaven. There is only One. He hung on the cross, in your place, and He died your death, so that when He rose, that would be your resurrection too. The sacrifice is complete. The exodus is complete. The glory is complete, and is now yours. It is finished.

He did all of that not for Himself, but for you. The glory that He showed in His Transfiguration was always His. He didn't come to get it. He came to give it to you. To give you faith now. To give you hope now. To give you confidence now. To give you life now. So that in seeing your Savior in a whole new light, you will see also your life, this life, in a whole new light. Not as a meaningless life drifting through time, but a life worth the life of God's own Son. A life that God will use, raise, and glorify, just as was done to Moses and Elijah.

You may not be able to see that clearly now. You may not be able to see the glory of your life now, but that's okay. What is now hidden will one day be revealed.⁷ The Father calls us not to see but to hear. The Father calls us to His Word of promise, His Word of truth, His Word of life. To listen to the Word made flesh.

So that as we leave the glory of season Epiphany, and enter into the sorrow of the season of Lent, we look up, like Peter, James, and John, and see Jesus, alone, and know that is enough.

Amen.