



Matthew 17:1-9 - After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." <sup>8</sup> When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

*It's good for us to be here!*



*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood – and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)*

Are you ready for Spring? Never mind the fact that we saw snowflakes on Friday – after that week long warm up we just experienced, I bet more than a few of you had thoughts of open windows, walks outside, and ditching that bulky winter coat. But then the reality set in – Oh yeah, it's still February. For three years before I arrived in Manhattan, I was serving Martin Luther College in Minnesota. You probably know that Minnesota winters tend to be long and harsh. The students at Martin Luther College know that, too. But it was always humorous to watch what happened when the snow and wind let up a bit and the sun came out. Every once in a while, in the midst of a 20 degrees below zero average week, there would be a 40 degree day...40! And guess what happened on campus? Look around on a day like that and you'd see shorts and t-shirts on several of the students. You'd see flip flops, you'd have to dodge Frisbees. That 60 degree swing from negative 20 to positive 40 brought with it the feeling and excitement of springtime. For those brief hours of relative warmth and sun, thoughts of winter had vanished and out came the shorts. A day like that in the middle of a harsh winter has a way of giving hope; hope that winter will eventually end and the warmth of summer will come. Today, as we observe the Transfiguration of our Lord, we are encouraged by a similar hope. Before we transition into the somber weeks of Lent, we catch a glimpse of Jesus' glory. We hear the voice of God himself assuring ultimate victory. We catch a preview of the triumph and glory of Easter Sunday. Truly, it's good for us to be here!

**After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.** Matthew's account of the transfiguration drops us into the middle of a scene with the words, "after six days." So, it would be good to rewind the narrative six days' time and see what happened last week. What happened last week were moments of both triumph and tragedy for Jesus' disciple, Peter. Six days ago, Peter boldly gave his confession of who Jesus is and what he came to do, the confession on which the entire Church is built: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** With that simple statement, Peter proclaimed the central truth of all Scripture: Jesus is the Son of God who came to save the world from sin. Certainly, a triumphant moment for Jesus' boisterous disciple. But that's not all that happened six days before the transfiguration. What else happened last week? Well, the ministry of Jesus started going down a different road, a road which Peter wasn't comfortable with. Instead of teaching large crowds with parables, Jesus used this time to prepare his disciples for his suffering and death. Jesus told them in no uncertain terms that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, be put to death, and rise on the third day.

Peter didn't like that. In fact, Peter disliked the idea of a weak and defeated Jesus so much that he actually rebuked Jesus; he scolded him for saying such things. The same one who boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ of God, now refuses to acknowledge that the cross is the way Jesus would accomplish his mission. What a week it was for Peter! Maybe that's why Jesus brought Peter with him, along with James and John, up the mountain to be by themselves. It was here, on this mountain, that Peter would come to learn an important truth that we do well to take with us into the upcoming days of Lent. Peter would learn that the glory of the Son of God and the suffering and shame of the cross are not mutually exclusive truths. Here Peter would come face to face with the stunning reality of his confession of who Jesus is – the Son of God.

Matthew tells us, **There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** This is where the rubber meets the road for the five syllable word "transfiguration." Words fail to do justice the splendor and glory and radiance of that sight. Jesus underwent a metamorphosis, a visible change. Matthew says, **His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** Luke's gospel



says Jesus' clothes were like **a flash of lightning**, and Mark says they were **whiter than anyone could bleach them**. While words fail us, the point is clear: radiance, dazzling purity, and heavenly glory were temporarily reassumed by the Son of God, all before the eyes of these three disciples. What a sight!

But what was the point? Why was it good for the disciples to see this? The days ahead were going to be dark. After this, Jesus would set his face toward Jerusalem and wouldn't look back. He'd suffer at the hands of mortals and die a criminal's death. During those dark days, the disciples would see the One they knew to be the Son of God look defeated, weak, and pitiful. They would be wondering, *"Where's the glory in this? This looks like failure! We've been duped; we followed the wrong teacher!"* To bolster the faith of his disciples, Jesus gave them a glimpse of his unveiled heavenly glory – the glory he set aside and willingly left behind to come to earth and suffer and die for our sins. Like a 70 degree day in the middle of a cold winter, this glorious sight on the mountain turned their focus to the future and to the one who holds the future. It was good for the disciples to be there, seeing Jesus' glory.

It's also good for us to be here, seeing the sights of Jesus' glory. For the past seven weeks, we've been celebrating the season of Epiphany. During Epiphany we turn our attention to Jesus as he is revealed to be the Son of God by his miracles, his teaching, and God's own voice of approval. Now, we transition into the weeks of Lent following Jesus to the cross of Calvary. It's during these weeks that we see a different kind of Jesus – one who looks defeated instead of triumphant, abandoned instead of embraced. Just like the disciples, we need to see the glory of our Savior especially because we're about to see him at the pinnacle of his humiliation. This glimpse of glory bolsters our faith and assures us that no matter what the suffering and death of Jesus may look like – he's the one who's in control. He's the one who's bringing salvation. Truly, it's good for us to be here.

**Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** As if the sight of Jesus in his heavenly glory weren't enough, two great heroes from the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, also appear and talk with Jesus. Luke's gospel tells us what they were talking about; they were talking about his departure, his suffering, death, and resurrection. This was all too much for Peter. So, true to form, Peter blurts out the first thing that comes to mind. **"It is good for us to be here...I will put up three shelters,"** one for each of you! Now, before we go any further, remember the week that Peter just had. He confessed Jesus to be the promised Savior, yet moments later couldn't stomach the thought of Jesus suffering and dying. Peter didn't want to face reality. He wanted to hold on to this glorious vision for as long as possible. He didn't want to return to the harsh realities that awaited him and the other disciples.

Maybe Peter should've offered to put up another tent for me, and one for you. Like Peter, we struggle to balance the glory we know we have in Christ with the "less than ideal" conditions we face as Christ's church in this world. Do you ever find yourself wishing things in your life, or your work, or your church would simply be "better"? It's human nature – just like it was with Peter – to shirk off the idea of failure, rejection, or suffering. So I start to envy the perfect family I see on Facebook. I look to the great outward success of my contemporaries and lament my station. We'd like to dismiss the notion of a *church militant* and jump right to *church triumphant*. I want to stay on the mountaintop – safe, happy, free from the thought of rejection or suffering. We'd rather stay with Peter on the mount of heavenly glory, trying desperately to grasp at something God has told us to wait for. Instead of going out to live as salt and light in a world of sin and darkness as Jesus commanded, we refuse to leave our little mountaintops. Instead of taking Jesus seriously when he says *"First the cross, then the crown,"* we want to skip the unpleasant part. God forgive us for our selfishness!



And he does, but not because of who we are; because of who his Son is. **While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** The One who never once shied away from an opportunity to share God's love, the One who had all the glory of heaven willingly came to earth to suffer and die for our sins. God approves of his work on our behalf and through faith in Christ and his work for us, God looks at each one of you and says, *"You are my son, my daughter. With you I am well pleased!"* To hear such peace giving words, to know God's love in Christ, it is good to be here. And grace upon grace, Jesus still gives you glimpses at his glory. He lifts the blindfold of your human situation and allows you to peer into his gracious, glorious heart. With some splashes of water and word; with bread and wine; with his written word; Jesus shows you his glory and calls on you to see the reality of who you are in Christ.

The transfiguration was only a temporary glimpse at Jesus' heavenly glory. Matthew tells us, **When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said, "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."** The spectacular sights and sounds on the mount of transfiguration left those three disciples terrified. Witnessing the unveiled glory of the Son of God and hearing the booming voice of God the Father himself – the disciples had the only reaction sinners can have in the presence of a holy God. They hit the deck. They buried their faces in the dirt and waited for the fist of God's wrath to come raining down on them. But that's not what happened. Instead, what did they feel? Not a fist, but a touch – a touch of love, of assurance, of peace. With a touch of his hand, Jesus calmed their fears and told them the same thing he tells us as we are about to ponder his passion, **"Don't be afraid."** Don't be afraid...Don't despair, because there's going to be a sequel.

In a matter of a few months, the disciples would know exactly what Jesus meant when he said, "The Son of Man has been raised from the dead." From tragedy to triumph, from grief to hope, the glory Jesus showed on the mount of transfiguration would return at Easter's empty tomb – this time for good. This glimpse at Jesus' glory gives us the assurance to know that when we finally get to that ultimate mountaintop experience called heaven; it will be forever. To see the sights, to hear the sounds, and to await the sequel to come; truly, it is good for us to be here!

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)*