

Listen to Him

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (19 February 2012)
Saint Mark 9:2-9

Dearly beloved, it is good that you are here this morning. Here in God's house. Here in Christ's presence. Here with your brothers and sisters in the one true faith. Hearing our Lord's Word. Receiving His forgiveness. Eating and drinking His body and blood. Growing in the grace and knowledge of your Lord. Yes, it is good that you are here this morning.

Peter, too, knew a good thing when he saw it. After six days, Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where He was transfigured before them. There on that mountain, these three disciples witnessed something extraordinary, a glimpse of our Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory. The three disciples saw Jesus' face shining like the sun and His clothes beaming radiantly, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. It was as if Jesus had swallowed the sun and it was shining through His flesh and blood. What's more, these three disciples also got to see and hear Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus about His upcoming suffering and death. Peter could not contain himself. He was overjoyed by what his eyes and ears were taking in, and did not want it to end. And so he exclaimed: **“Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”**

What Peter, James, and John saw was a glimpse of heaven. They saw Jesus in all His glory. They saw Moses, whose body was carried to heaven by the archangel Michael sometime after his death. And they saw Elijah, who never saw death, but was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. No wonder Peter exclaimed: **“It is good that we are here.”** What could be better? And once you've seen heaven, the last thing you want to do is come back to earth. That is why Peter was interested in pitching three tents. He wanted to remain on that mountain forever.

But the reality of life in this sinful world is this: Most of it is lived down here in the valley. In the daily grind. In the hustle and bustle of work, school, and home, in the chaos and commotion of schedules, activities, and appointments. You long for some quiet time, some peace and solitude, some time away from the daily grind. But there's more. For busy schedules and hectic lives are actually the least of your problems. There are plenty of other places you find yourself, places that are not

good to be. I'm not talking about dark alleys, obnoxious crowds, or roadside with car problems. Too often you find yourself in the worst location of all.

- ✓ You find yourself turned inward, delighting in your heart's desires.
- ✓ You find yourself misusing God's name.
- ✓ You find yourself bored with preaching and God's Word.
- ✓ You find yourself despising parents, teachers, bosses, and leaders.
- ✓ You find yourself holding grudges and harboring anger.
- ✓ You find yourself lusting and taking pleasure in impure thoughts.
- ✓ You find yourself cheating others and being stingy with God.
- ✓ You find yourself spreading the latest gossip and ruining reputations.
- ✓ You find yourself coveting that which you have not been given.

And through it all—this sinful way of life that bogs you down—you often find yourself filled with guilt and shame, loneliness and despair, emptiness and disappointment. It is not good that you are there. It is not good that you get lost in your sins, that you delight in them, that you allow your sinful nature to have its way with you. It is not good at all.

But fear not, for our Lord Jesus again calls you out of that no good place called sin to this very good place called forgiveness, to this mountaintop called the church, to the Word of God that chases away all doubt and fear, to the heavenly glory that is found only in His resurrected body and blood. It is indeed good that you are here this morning.

Here is your heaven on earth, for here is where Jesus is, where He comes to you, forgives you, feeds you, and shares His glory with you.

Here is where He takes you to the cross, incorporates you into His wounds, and bathes you in His blood.

Here is where you die with Christ, that He might forever bury your sin in His tomb.

And here is where you live with Christ, born anew in the water of Holy Baptism as children of the heavenly Father, zealous for the good works He has prepared for you to do.

Yes, it is very good that you are here.

Peter, James, and John were indeed given a glimpse of heaven. They saw Jesus shining in all His glory and heard the Father's voice. But then it was back to the reality of life in this sinful world. Back to the valley. Back to the daily grind. Back to the hustle and bustle of discipleship that ultimately led them to our Lord's cross, where they would see and hear even greater things.

Remember, our Lord's transfiguration cannot be divorced from the Lenten path that follows. After all, the transfiguration was not Christ's most glorious moment. The resurrection was, and the resurrection comes only after His crucifixion. When Jesus came down from this mountain, He did not leave His glory behind, but proceeded to the greater glory atop another mountain—Golgotha—where the glory of the Law and the prophets (embodied in Moses and Elijah) gave way to the greater glory of Christ, His cross, His love, His righteousness.

Today we bid farewell to the word Alleluia and prepare to enter the Lenten season. It is good for you to be here, because Jesus is here, and the entire Divine Service is about Jesus. Moses preached Jesus. Elijah preached Jesus. So I preach Jesus. As you take up your cross anew and follow Jesus to His, watch and listen. See the Lamb go uncomplaining forth. Listen to His words of truth, His words of institution, His words of forgiveness, His words of victory and peace. Marvel how the Son of God became the Son of Man, that you sons of men might become sons of God. Marvel that the Righteous One clothed Himself in your sin and died in your place, that you might be clothed in His righteousness and live forever!

And what about all those sins I listed earlier? What about all those places that are not good to be? Friends, each of you has sins against which you struggle, thoughts and desires that continually plague you, temptations tailored by the devil to weigh you down. Confess those sins. Place your sins at Christ's feet daily in prayer and regularly here in the Divine Service. Confess them privately to me if hearing Christ's absolution personally applied will benefit you. After all, there is no worse place for a Christian to be than alone in his sin, for to be alone in your sin is to utterly alone, battling a foe far more powerful than yourself.

Today, the Father's voice calls to you once again: **“This is My beloved Son; listen to Him.”** Heed that invitation. Listen and learn. Repent and believe. Eat and drink. Study and pray. And therein find Jesus Christ, the Son of God, filling you with His forgiveness, enriching you with His life, transfiguring you into a beloved child of the Father, with whom He is well pleased. What else is there to say, but to confess with Saint Peter: **“Rabbi, it is good that we are here.”**

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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