

## **Transfiguration and the Lord's Supper**

Matthew 17:1-9

A Sermon for Transfiguration Sunday

On this festival Sunday we have this strange text in which Jesus goes up the mountain and he is transfigured, whatever that is. It seems to have something to do with glory, with brightness. But in any case, what is this about?

We find this account in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not in John. It helps us end or close the season of Epiphany, this season of the light coming forth, and it helps us look forward to the glory of Easter.

What does it mean?

First, it's worth remembering something about Moses and Elijah. In our Old Testament text for today Moses goes up the mountain and the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire. Later Moses asked the Lord: "I'd like to see you." And the Lord said: "You can't see me and live. But You can see my back." So Moses hid in the crevice of the rock and was there protected from the full glory then when he came down the mountain his face shown so brightly that nobody could stand it. The story goes that he had to wear a veil because the light was such astonishing brightness (2 Cor 3:7-18).

Moses is there as one who gave the law.

Then Elijah appears, too, as the first and the greatest of the prophets. You'll remember how Elijah was in a contest with the pagan-priests of Baal over who worshipped the true God. Elijah won. He was eventually taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. And there was also someone in Genesis named Enoch, and Enoch was the one whom the Lord took as well (Genesis 5:2-14). So there is something there about being caught up in the glory of the Lord.

We're interested in that. You know the old spiritual: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." We've heard about the glory road. We like to sing about the glory.

What was this mountain top with Jesus about? As a matter of fact, Peter found it very confusing. He mumbles and stumbles and says: "Let's make three tents." In other words, let's stay here. This is a mountain top experience, but it didn't last. They came down.

First of all, the text in 2 Peter 1: 16-17 talks about the majestic glory of the Transfiguration and how the voice from heaven says: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." In 2 Corinthians 3:18 it says: "We are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another." It's important to remember that Paul, writing in Romans 8:29-30 says: "He already glorified us." The past tense.

Most helpful of all is what comes in the Gospel of John, chapter 12. There, glory is the cross. That's different.

As we come to the end of this season of Epiphany, we remember, as John 1 says: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father."

And we remember how Jesus, the Word of God, comes to us—through preaching of Christ, through Baptism, the Lord's Supper, through the power of the keys, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren (Smalcald III/IV). In these ways, the Lord reaches down to save us, over against any ideas that we are the ones who have to make it happen. He snatches us (Large Catechism IV:83).

What does the glory of the Transfiguration mean for us when we celebrate the Lord Supper?

What is happening here and now when the Word of God, his promises, come to us in the Lord's Supper?

When we think about communion, there are lots of moving parts and questions which arise. What if a wafer falls on the ground? What do we do with it? What if we run out of wine in the middle of the service? Do we have then to say the words of institution over a new tray of wine? When does it (the real presence of Christ) happen?

And who should be allowed? In LCMS there is closed communion. Who is included and excluded? Have often should we have it? What do we do with what's left over?

All of these questions are really secondary. They may be interesting or even fun in their own ways, but the real point is: This is really important. It's so important that how can you not take it seriously?

What would happen if every Sunday our church had communion, the ushers would hand each person a \$100 bill as each one comes for communion? Just watch. Think of how the word would spread, and more people would show up. Hey, go to church here and get \$100 every time you go to communion.

In fact, what we're dealing with in the Lord's Supper is something so enormous. Yet people seem to have a veil over their eyes. They don't get it. The glory. What is the glory?

Recall the decline of the ancient Roman empire. It dissipated into bread and circuses. The people said: "Just give us something to eat and some entertainment. We don't care." It was all going downhill fast. Of course, then in 476 AD., it fell in a terrible way.

What about us? \$100 for coming forward?

This is life. The promise that the Lord makes is that when you and I receive him in Word and in his sacraments, the promise is: This is real life, eternal life.

Jesus had the same thing happen, as would have happened to us, if we had decided to hand out \$100 bills for each of us today. That's spelled out in John 6. He fed the 5,000, and they wanted him to do it again. Give us miracles; give us food and something to think about. And he said: "They don't understand."

And same with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Those who drink of ordinary water have to drink again, but "those who drink the water I give, live forever" (John 4:14).

And the same is true of bread. Those who eat ordinary bread eat for daily sustenance. The bread of communion is different. Jesus said: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). That makes all the difference.

But they didn't want it because it's his way, not their way.

Why come to church? Why come to the Lord's Supper? That's where the glory is. That's where eternal life is.

The real question is: How could we neglect this enormous thing? Or think it a bother. We think: "It really can't be that way. I mean doesn't he has to be nice to all of us anyway." Or: "I don't see how it could matter."

When in fact the Lord says: "It's in my Word and sacraments." That's how it happens.

We fall into the temptation that Adam and Eve fell into. Remember the Lord said: "Eat of every tree but the one."

And the temptation was that they said: "Well, we have to figure that out our way, for ourselves, not the Lord's way." And the Lord's way is the way that he works, and the other ways don't have the promise.

Therefore, as we look at the glory and how it works, and what is happening in the Lord's Supper, we can remind ourselves of what it says in Hebrews 2:3: "How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Amen