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## The Last Sunday after Epiphany

### The Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 11, 2024

#### Jesus Appears in Glory

The worship season that follows the Epiphany ends today. The Sundays since January 6 have recapped for us the truth that Jesus appeared on the scene at the beginning of his ministry as the Savior and healer of all people. In today's Gospel, Jesus is preparing his apostles for the deathly days that will follow. He shored up their confidence by showing himself in the stunning magnificence of his glory. He pulled back the trappings of his humanity and was transfigured in their sight. May the remembrance of his glory prepare for the difficult journey of his Passion.

#### Sermon

#### Mark 9:2-10

**After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.**

**Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)**

**Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"**

**Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.**

**As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.**

Introduction: When the game's over tonight stadium crews will wheel a big stage out onto the field for the presentation of the Lombardi trophy. The commissioner will hand the trophy to the team owner and the team owner will hand it to the coach and the coach will hand it to the best players and then they'll hand it around to all the other players. And everybody will be laughing and grinning and holding the trophy over their heads. The owner won't be thinking of the millions of dollars he's paying those players and the coach won't be thinking of the hundreds of hours it took to design the plays and the players won't be thinking about the long practices and bone crunching tackles. The confetti will be raining down on them and the fireworks will be exploding and all they'll be thinking of is the glory of winning the biggest prize in sports. And half a billion people will be watching it all on TV. Vince Lombardi used to say, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing."

We're all kind of like that really. We gaze at the new house with a smile on our face and we kind of forget how long we skimped and save for the downpayment. We see the yard with the flowers blooming and the lawn looking like a golf course and we ignore the sore back and the blisters. We watch our kids excel in school sports or music and we put the sacrifices we made and the money spent behind us. We all like the glory. It's easy to forget the pain.

Peter was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him. It didn't take long for Peter to be the talker who told Jesus what was on everybody's mind. We heard Peter speaking in today's Gospel and he was certainly saying what James and John were thinking. They all liked what they were seeing up on that mountain. You heard Peter: **It is good for us to be here.** Peter liked the glory. He didn't much like the pain. In fact, he didn't even understand it.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is a lot like Easter. It's all about the glory. This morning, we get to see Jesus in all his glory: the brilliant light, the illustrious companions, the voice of God. It's the same mood we have on Easter. We all like the glory. Everybody shows up on Easter Sunday! But on Lenten Wednesdays? Not so much. In three days, white turns to black and then to purple. The alleluias disappear. It's lilies on Easter; it's ashes in Lent. Lent seems more like the agony of defeat than the thrill of victory. You and I have come to understand what Peter didn't understand but we run the risk of repeating his mistake. The truth is:

### **We Long to See the Glory**

It took the apostles a long time to figure out what Jesus was really all about. They heard the sermons and they saw the miracles and they adored it all. They believed Jesus was the Holy One of God; they confessed that he was the promised Messiah. But they never really grappled with what it would take for him to be the Savior. There were plenty of clues. Isaiah wrote about the suffering Savior and so did David in the psalms. Just a week before, Jesus laid it all out **that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this.** Peter tried to talk him out of it! Jesus called him Satan: **Get behind me Satan.**

Six days later this happened. **Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.** What they saw on that mountain and what we see in today's Gospel is really magnificent. First, it's the brilliance. Mark describes Jesus' clothes as **dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.** Matthew wrote **his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light.** Luke writes that **Jesus' face changed and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.** What they saw and what we see is what is behind the truly human of Jesus. They saw and we see the God from God and the Light from light and true God from true God. There is more to Jesus than the handsome face and the open arms that we see in pictures and statues. There is more to Jesus than a good shepherd and a lover of children. The Jesus they followed and the Jesus we worship **is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.** What else did they see? They saw Elijah and Moses, both long gone from earth but both brought back by God for this dynamic event. They were there and they are here this morning to testify that God's promises never change, that they are as true today as they were on Mt. Sinai where God made promises to Moses and adopted Israel and on Mt. Carmel where God made promises to Elijah and annihilated Israel's enemies. Elijah and Moses stand with Jesus because Jesus is the epicenter of God's promises to save. And then there was the cloud that hides the unseeable magnificence of God and the voice: **This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him.** Jesus stands alone in the story of God. He is not one man in a series of great men. Jesus had no predecessors and he has no successors. Jesus is one of a kind. He is the God-man, he is the God with us. **There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all people.** That's what Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain and that's what we see in the Gospel. And we love it. **We long to see the glory!**

That's exactly how Peter felt. **Teacher, it is good for us to be here! Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.** Peter was convinced that this was it! This is the kingdom Jesus has been talking about all along, this is the power he's been showing in his miracles; this is the glory All of Israel had been waiting for. And he was willing to help: he and James and John would build the shelters. Peter had a good heart. He longed for the glory and he wanted to keep it.

I get that and I'm sure you do too. There are a lot of people here today who don't much care about the glory that comes with a Super Bowl win, but we all long for the glory that comes from God. We like to go to sleep at night knowing that God forgives our sins, that he keeps us in faith, and that he promises us heaven. We're eager for the golden streets and the jeweled gates and the happy reunions we'll find there. We long to see our nation return to God and restore the moral values people once held. We would love to see our churches growing and people filling the pews. That's all good; no problems. Just like Peter, James, and John, we long to see the glory.

And then, all at once the glory was gone. **Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.** No light, no heroes, no cloud, no voice—only Jesus. And Jesus knew there was a problem. These three apostles didn't really understand the kingdom, the power, and glory. For one thing, they wanted the glory for themselves while there were nine other apostles waiting down below. But there was something more, something deeper. They were forgetting or ignoring or denying that there could be no glory without pain. **As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.** Without the Passover weekend the coming spring, without the three days that surrounded it, without the pain and penalty of Friday and deathly entombment of Saturday and the victory and vindication of Sunday, there would be no glory. The prophets told them this was coming. Jesus told them this was coming, but they didn't get it. And until it all happened they were not going to get this; they wouldn't have a clue. **They kept the matter to themselves,** Mark tells us, **but they were discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.** They longed for the glory but they didn't grasp how the glory would be gained. They loved the glory on the mountain but they came down from the mountain with no one and nothing but Jesus. And Jesus was on his way to the cross.

We long to see the glory, but there is no glory without the cross. Churches will grow and pews will be filled only when you and I preach Christ crucified. People will return to God and turn away from their immoral ways only when they kneel at the foot of the cross. God will welcome us to heaven because Jesus bled and died to open the gates that Satan once closed. God forgives our sins because Jesus paid the penalty our sins deserved. Lent may seem dark and dreary but when we pull away the darkness and the dreariness, we find the brilliance of the cross. **We long to see the glory** and it is good that we do. But the glory we long for is in the cross Christ died on. May it be that we follow that glory in the weeks and Wednesdays ahead. Amen.

*The sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.*