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The Last Sunday after Epiphany

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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It Is Good for Us to Be Here

The Lutheran Church observes the Transfiguration of Our Lord on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Beginning at Christmas we listen and learn that Jesus revealed himself as the Son of God. As Lent begins, we remember that Jesus, the Son of God, came to our world to take our place under the punishment of sin and redeem us for life with God. Today we descend the mountain of Jesus' glory and begin the journey to the hill of his utter shame where he destroyed death forever.

Sermon

2 Peter 1:16-21

For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction – In an average year, 50,393 people die in the state of Wisconsin. If you do the math, that means that 138 people die in Wisconsin every day and that three people die every hour. Unless one of those people was a close relative or friend, none of those deaths means anything to us. Except for a few, we didn't know them and we never met them; they are nameless and faceless to us and we simply don't think about them.

Every year at this point on the Christian calendar you and I begin to think about the death of Jesus. On Sundays we think about the final weeks before his death and on Wednesdays we think about the final hours. Jesus' death is more than just a focus for us. We are fixated on his death and consumed by his death because we pin our hopes on his death. We believe that his death paid the penalty our sins deserved, that it restored peace with God, and that it opened the gates of paradise. Jesus' death means everything to us. And yet we never knew him or met him. We wouldn't recognize him if we saw him on the street. In some ways he's no different from the 50,393 people who die in Wisconsin every year. How do we handle this? How do we manage the Season of Lent?

They were people a lot like us. Jesus meant everything to them. The apostles taught them that Jesus had promised to come back and they were counting on him to come back soon. They were pinning their future on him. But they never knew him or met him or heard him or saw him and now there were preachers who were debunking the idea that he was coming back and demolishing their hopes for heaven. These were the people Peter was writing to in the Second Reading for today. He had discovered they were concerned and conflicted about Jesus. He wrote to remind them of everything they had learned and to assure them that they could trust the truths they believed.

Peter is speaking these words to us this morning as we begin our annual journey to the cross. There's a tension here every year. We are following a man who lived long ago and far away, a man we never knew and never met. Scoffers and skeptics are everywhere, maybe even in our own families and circle of friends. And sometimes we wonder and sometimes we worry:

Can We Trust the Truths of Lent?

Peter has an answer. Let's see what he says.

1. One of the most important truths that Jesus taught was that he was going to come back and reclaim his followers. Many of the first Christians were sure Jesus was coming soon. But when Jesus didn't come and he didn't come the believers started to wonder. False teachers turned their wonder into worry. Peter wrote that the false teachers were **bringing the truth into disrepute** and **exploiting the believers with fabricated stories**.

So here's how Peter responded: **We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power**. The apostles didn't need tricks or gimmicks to sell the Jesus story. They didn't have to rely on myths or make believe. Peter wrote: **We were eyewitnesses of his majesty**. The apostles saw it all—the water made into wine, the sick made well, the dead made alive. Peter could have mentioned hundreds of majestic episodes, but here he pointed to the majesty he and James and John had witnessed on the mountain we heard about today. On that mountain Jesus pulled back the veil of his humanity and allowed those three disciples a glimpse of his divinity. Jesus **was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus**. Now there was majesty! But they saw more. They saw that **Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."**

Could these first century believers be certain that Jesus was coming again? God the Father said yes on that mountain. Jesus wasn't some half-baked fly-by-night imposter. He wasn't a fraud. He showed himself to be God from God and Light from Light. On that mountain God the Father identified Jesus as his dearly loved Son and his designated choice to save the world: to live and die and rise again to free people from sin and guilt and fear and death. Peter saw all this; he was an eyewitness and he was an earwitness, too. He wrote: **We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain**. Peter didn't read about it in a book or hear about it from a friend. And he certainly didn't make this up--you don't make this kind of stuff up! He saw it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears and so did James and John. Could those first Christians be sure that Jesus was coming again? Can you and I trust the truth of Lent as we follow Jesus to the cross again this year? God the Father said yes to all of us and he said yes on the mountain of Jesus' transfiguration.

2. The majesty Peter saw in Jesus' ministry and especially at the Transfiguration cemented his confidence in his Old Testament Bible. The Old Testament prophets carefully and consistently pointed ahead to the coming Messiah. As Peter walked with Jesus and as he watched Jesus in action, he saw those prophecies fulfilled one

after another after another. Could his readers be sure Jesus was coming again? God said Yes and Peter was an eyewitness to that yes on the mountain. God said Yes again and Peter saw that yes written on the scrolls of the scriptures. He wrote, **We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable** and then he added: **and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.** From now until the day when Jesus comes again, Peter wrote, you can trust the scriptures.

We can trust the scriptures, too. What Peter wrote here explains and defends the reliability of the Bible with magnificent clarity. **Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.** There has never been a book like the Bible and there never will be. People with ideas write their ideas in books. Plato wrote dialogues, Hitler wrote Mein Kaempf, Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon. The Bible's authors didn't write their ideas; they wrote God's ideas. Not with magic, not by dictation. The writers sat at their own desks and used their own pens. They wrote in their own style and relied on their own research. But they never wrote a word that was not a word from God. They never formed a sentence when they were not carried along by the Holy Spirit. The teachers of the Church call this verbal inspiration. St. Paul defined verbal inspiration like this: **All Scripture is God-breathed.** Infallible, flawless, foolproof. This is the truth the Bible teaches and this is truth we confess and believe.

Can we trust the truths of Lent? Do we have to believe that a holy God demands holiness from us? Must we really admit that we were sinful at birth and that in sin our mothers conceived us? Must we confess that the soul that sins shall die? God says Yes to us in the Scriptures. Is it really true that the Son of God appeared to destroy the devil's work? Can I be sure that Christ Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross? Can I actually believe that God made him who had no sin to be sin for me? Can I go to sleep at night knowing that the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son, cleanses me from all sin? Those are the truths of Lent, brothers and sisters. Those are the truths we hear about on Sundays and on Wednesdays. Those are the truths we sing about and pray about. Can we trust the truths of Lent? Can we pin our hopes on them? Can we find life with God in them? Do we gain the hope of heaven in them? God says yes. God says yes to us on today's holy mountain and he says yes to us in his own sacred Scriptures. Jesus loves me--this I know for the Bible tells me so! Come along and begin the journey of Lent. Amen.