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The Last Sunday after Epiphany

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 27, 2022

Glory Uncovered

When it is most hidden, it is most on display

On the Last Sunday after Epiphany, the Lutheran Church focuses on the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Jesus took three of his disciples to a high mountain and there uncovered and revealed his true glory. He did this to prepare them for the difficult days ahead when he would hide his glory as he suffered and died. They would soon learn, however, as we have learned, that Jesus' true glory is magnificently displayed as he offered his life and death in our place to save us.

Luke 9:28-36

Are We on the Same Page as Jesus?

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, 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 he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Introduction – If we're going to understand the Transfiguration of Our Lord, we have to know what Jesus was thinking when it happened. We're jumping ahead from where we were last Sunday by more than a year. The early popularity was past. People were sensing that Jesus wasn't going to be the conquering hero they were hoping for. The Jewish leaders had enough and were planning Jesus' death. More and more Jesus stayed away from the crowds. The apostles were loyal, but they were confused. It came time for Jesus to sit them down and let them know what was going to happen. **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** So there was the plan in a nutshell. Everything God had promised, everything written by Moses to Malachi, everything Jesus needed to do to overturn sin and death--it would all happen within the next six months.

And there was more: **Whoever wants to be my disciple, Jesus said, must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.** Life would be hard for Jesus' followers. Jesus' enemies would attack his followers the way they attacked Jesus. They could run if they wanted to but running would lead them away from Jesus. If they stayed with Jesus, they would carry crosses just as he had. What they would gain with Jesus would be pretty awesome but getting there could be pretty awful.

The final journey to Jerusalem was ready to begin. What would be the final journey for Jesus would be the beginning of the Church. Jesus wanted his followers to understand the future and to buy into his plan. He wanted them to trust his cross and accept theirs, he wanted them to expect his resurrection and long for theirs. Jesus needed to get his followers on the same page as he was. And that's what was on Jesus' mind when he started to climb this mountain.

So here we are, four days away from the beginning of Lent. We're about to begin our annual six-week trek to Holy Week. On the way we'll review the suffering, the killing, and the resurrection. We'll remember the challenges and charges we face as we follow. But first Jesus is going to take us to the mountain so that we might ask ourselves:

Are We on the Same Page as Jesus?

So Jesus told the twelve what they needed to start thinking about—his cross and their crosses. He let about a week pass for it all to sink in. Luke tells us what happened next. **About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.** Those three apostles had followed Jesus to quiet places before; nothing unusual so far. But then something very unusual: **As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.** Luke wasn't on the mountain so he relied on the men who were there to describe what they saw. But they struggled to describe this; human language doesn't have words for this. Luke wrote that Jesus' face changed and Matthew wrote that Jesus' face shone like the sun. Luke wrote that his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightening—lightening is five times brighter than the sun—and Matthew wrote that Jesus clothes were as white as light. Mark uses the words dazzling white. Different words; same phenomenon. Jesus was giving them a glimpse of the indescribable brilliance of God, light which no human being can see and live. The fully human Jesus, the truly human Jesus, was showing them the divine Jesus: God from God, Light from light, true God from true God. **The supernatural sight of God was there on that mountain.**

And so were Moses and Elijah and this was just as supernatural. This wasn't a vision; the disciples weren't having a bad dream. Moses and Elijah were there, body and soul. I wish I could explain to you how God pulled this off, but I can't. Bible experts have their theories, but they're just theories. It comes down to this: In a way that defies human intelligence and logic, in some supernatural way, God brought these two Old Testament prophets to that mountain.

Jesus is on his way to suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus is leading his followers to the crosses they will carry. That's what was on his mind. And on that mountain all the divine powers of heaven and earth, all the supernatural forces of God's universe were on the same page as Jesus.

Moses and Elijah didn't just stand there. Moses was the founder of the nation of Israel; Elijah reformed the nation. Luke wrote, **They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.** Of course, the departure was Jesus' departure into death. They both knew about that. Moses saw it in the worship rite God established for the nation of Israel. He saw it in the sacrifices which had set down the principle that **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.** Elijah saw it, too. He saw it in God's determined effort to root out the influences of evil in Israel, he heard it in the words God empowered him to speak and the miracles God empowered him to perform. Moses and Elijah knew about the death God was planning for his Son. They knew about the victory God's Son would win. God sent them to support Jesus and encourage him to finish the job. Moses and Elijah were on the same page as Jesus.

And then God added his own voice. Luke tells us what happened. **A cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."** "Everything on my Son's mind," God meant to say, "all that is on my mind, too." His Son entering the world as a human baby—God planned that. The perfect life Jesus lived—God demanded that. The cross Jesus could see in the future—God saw it way back in eternity. The victory Jesus gained on Easter—that's why God sent Jesus. Do I have to say this? It's pretty obvious: God was on the same page as his Son.

So this is what we know as we walk to this mountain today. Jesus laid his plan down clearly for us. He came into our world to suffer, bleed, and die so that we could be released from the vice grip of sin and the horror of hell. He rose from the dead to guarantee that his victory is our victory. He prepared us to carry the crosses we might have to carry because we follow him. That's what was on Jesus' mind then and it's what's on Jesus' mind now. Are we on the same page as Jesus?

Those three disciples weren't on the same page; at least Peter wasn't. Peter saw the glory and he forgot about the cross. **As Moses and Elijah were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** How dumb was that? Moses and Elijah had shelters in heaven. Luke tells us that Peter **did not know what he was saying.** But Peter was being more than dumb; he was doubting. He made it clear from the start that he wanted nothing to do with the cross, not Jesus' cross and not his. He wanted to stay where life was good and life was easy. He didn't want to think about sin and death and hell. He wanted no part of personal crosses and hard choices. Peter eventually figured it out, but not on this day. On this day Peter wasn't on the same page as Jesus.

To be on the same page as Jesus means we have to avoid Peter's confusion and doubt. We have to live with the reality of our sins even when it isn't comfortable to do that. I mean, who likes to think about that? Well, we need to think about that. We

can't ignore our sins or brush them off or make excuses. That doesn't mean we have to walk around in sack cloth and ashes. It does mean that we recognize every day that sin is the ultimate problem in our lives. To be on the same page with Jesus means that the cross is much more than a symbol we put on our steeples and altars and much more than something we wear around our neck or pin on our lapels. The cross is where the Son of God carried our sins on his back and paid the price to free us. The cross is where God himself turned his back to his Son in justice so that he might turn his face toward us in love. To be on the same page with Jesus is to know that Easter is much more than lilies and breakfasts and spring. Easter announces the most important truth of our lives: Because Jesus lives, we will live forever. To be on the same page as Jesus means that following Jesus is much more than being in church or putting money in envelopes. Life with Jesus battles temptations from Satan, society, and self. Life with Jesus endures the contempt of people we know. Life with Jesus accepts the challenge to sacrifice things we enjoy. And life with Jesus includes the resolve to live each day better than the day before.

Starting this Wednesday, we will begin to review what was on Jesus' mind as he walked to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It won't be so easy to follow him. And that's why Jesus brought us to this mountain today. Here we see the supernatural powers of the universe in blinding brilliance and the presence of prophets long gone. Here we realize that all the promises of Moses and Elijah are fulfilled in the words and works of Jesus. On this mountain we hear the voice of God certifying the ministry of his Son. They all were on the same page as Jesus. And they mean to move us and lead us to the same place. So come down from the mountain now and follow Jesus page after page after page. Amen.