

**Eyewitnesses of His Majesty
February 18 and 19, 2023
The Transfiguration of our Lord**

II Peter 1:16-21 - For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Dear Friends in Christ,

A preacher, a farmer, and a carpenter went hunting for deer one day. Much to their delight, a big buck sprang up before their very eyes. All three shot, and the deer fell over dead. The hard part was sorting out who had actually shot the buck. A game warden came along and offered to help them figure it out. He examined the deer, he looked at their licenses, and said to one of them, "You're the preacher, right?" "Yes, I am." "You're the one who shot the deer." All three men wanted to know how he could be so sure it was the preacher who killed the deer." Because the bullet went in one ear and out the other."

This was one of the problems the early disciples were having - the words of Jesus were going in one ear and out the other. Jesus kept telling them that He was going to have to suffer much at the hands of the elders, ruling priests, and Bible scholars of that day, but they didn't want to hear it. Jesus kept on predicting that the road ahead included death by crucifixion and self-denial and taking up your crosses every day, and it just didn't seem to be sinking in.

So also with you and me, dear friends. If we can receive the forgiveness of sins on a Sunday morning and then go back and hold grudges all week long, the Word of God has, in fact, gone in one ear and out the other. If we can sing praises to the Triune God this morning and spend the rest of the day being crabby and ornery and self-centered, the Word of God has in fact, gone in one ear and out the other. If we can know our Bible well enough to recite all kinds of Bible verses but not well enough to be sincerely repenting and amending our wrong behaviors, we have the same problem the early disciples had.

Our Lord's solution to that problem with his early disciples was to take three of them up on a high mountain all by themselves. It was to be transfigured before them. The Greek word for transfiguration is the source of the English word, metamorphosis - a word we use to describe the stages an insect passes through as it becomes a butterfly.

The face of Jesus shined like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. This reminds us of the brightness of Moses' face when he came down from Mt. Sinai, in reflection of God's glory. It reminds us of the glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds at Bethlehem on the night of our Savior's birth. It reminds us of the bright shining angel at Jesus' tomb on Easter morning.

Our sermon series in this Epiphany season has been under the theme, "A Season of Light." We have focused this burning desire of our God to have mercy on broken-hearted and hurting sinners. For His Church to be proclaiming His Gospel with great joy and energy to the corners of the globe. For Christians in every neighborhood to be letting their Gospel lights shine in such a way that our Father in heaven gets the glory. Sermon themes have included a variety of metaphors: Planters and Waterers / Salt and Light / Following and Fishing / Seeing and Pointing / Rising and Shining.

Today's metaphor is that we are "Eyewitnesses." The assignment of a witness in a court of law, of course, is to say what he has seen with his eyes and heard with his ears. Nothing more, nothing less. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about what you saw and heard.

I agreed to be a witness in court one time. And if I have my druthers, it will be one and done. I say that because I agreed to be a witness in a custody case. Both parents wanted custody of three boys, ages 8, 10, and 12, or so. Mom was Lutheran, and Dad was Roman Catholic. The mom was a member of the Lutheran Church I served, and one of the questions the judge asked me was often this mom brought her boys to church. I answered truthfully, which was "not very often." But then I added a caveat by explaining that when they did come to church, they sat in the balcony, which was far enough away that I didn't always know who was sitting up there." To which the Judge who was known to be a strong Roman Catholic replied, "Humph, my priest always knows if I'm in church or not!"

In our Epistle lesson for today, Peter described the three disciples as eyewitnesses of divine majesty. Their assignment was to spend the rest of their days turning the world upside down by proclaiming Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of the world. Their experience included Moses and Elijah showing up and talking with Jesus about what was soon to happen. Moses represented the Law, and Elijah the Old Testament prophets. Their experience included a bright cloud overshadowing them, and the voice of the Father testifying that Jesus was his beloved Son, He was well pleased with Him, and they should listen to him. Their experience included falling down on their faces in terror, and then Jesus coming over to them, touching them, and inviting them to stand back up and not to be afraid.

Today, I invite you to focus on the three statements of the Father, as we consider what it means for us to spend the rest of our lives as eyewitnesses of divine majesty.

Statement #1 - Jesus is the beloved Son of our Father in heaven.

As I was writing this sermon on Wednesday afternoon, I received word that a friend of ours from Tallahassee had passed away. Adam was friends with some of our best friends. Every time we spent time with him, he was kind and charming and a joy to be around. He told terrific stories, and had a wonderful sense of humor. A few days ago, he was in a car accident resulting in a broken neck and all kinds of internal injuries. He underwent one or more surgeries, he struggled to breathe, and then he passed away.

His significant other wrote on Facebook, "There are no words. My life will never be the same. Her daughter, who viewed Adam as a father figure, wrote, "My heart is shattered today."

What shall we say to these ladies and so many who are bent low in grief this week? We say what we know to be true from our mother's knees - that Jesus is Who He claimed to be - the beloved Son of our Father in heaven. That all of His teachings are true. That all of His promises may be trusted. That for the people of God, car accidents and ventilators and funeral homes and cemeteries don't get the final word. Jesus and His angels get the final word. That at the moment of death those angels carried the soul of Adam into the presence of Christ. That in Christ there is forgiveness of sins, there will be a resurrection of the body, there will be an everlasting life where your loved one will live face to face with Jesus Himself.

Statement #2 - Our Father is pleased with His Son.

Human nature is such that when terrible illness or deep tragedy strikes our families, we imagine that God is angry with us. The mission of the Church is to say again and again to those who feel as though God is punishing them - No, in fact, God took out His anger for the sins of the world on His only and beloved Son at the cross.

For example, one of my Facebook friends from Minnesota posted this past week that her 42 year old son Andrew was found in his apartment with *severe bizarre, unexplainable injuries...two broken shoulders, two broken hips, a broken pelvis, a cracked vertebrae, a broken femur, a bowel perforated, sepsis...*

If you were given an opportunity to witness to Andrew and his family, what would you say? In today's Epistle Lesson, Peter urges Christians in all generations to pay close attention to the Scriptures, for they are like a lamp shining in a dark place. To know that Scriptures aren't just human opinions on paper, but the very words of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, our Father would point Christians in all circumstances of life to focus on His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased.

The author Chad Bird described the mission of the Church this way,
Simply to the cross we cling. And simply to the cross we direct sinners. Or, to put it more precisely, we bring the cross to sinners.

Every sermon is like a basket full of life giving fruit picked from the cross tree and passed out to everyone who hungers for grace.

Every hymn and song is like a pitcher of water, filled from the fountain of the cross, taken to those fevered by evil, to slake their thirst.

Every Lord's Supper is a feast of the Lamb of God, which brings the food of the cross to starving sinners that they might taste and see that the Lord is good.

The Church doesn't take people back to the cross but takes the cross to where people are now. On the mountaintops of laughter or vales of tears. Happily married or shattered by divorce. Free or incarcerated. Moral or immoral. One day or a hundred years old.

We determine to know one thing and one thing only. Jesus is the answer to every human hurt, every human failure, every human shame, every human desire.

Statement #3 - We should listen to Jesus.

This past Tuesday I almost ran out of gas on the Veterans Expressway on my way to church. Even though I knew already three days earlier that I should fill up. Even though I had easy access to four or five gas stations Monday, Sunday, and Saturday. I just didn't take the time to do what I knew I should do. I was lazy or maybe forgetful or perhaps inattentive or perhaps all of the above.

Running out of gas for our cars is one thing. Running out of gas spiritually is quite another. I doubt if I'm the only one here who has found himself too busy to pray for days in a row or perhaps caught up in devotional times at best described as shallow - and as a result we find ourselves running on empty.

If it's true that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, then it's also true that faith will inevitably decline when we don't have ears to hear.

If it's true that blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it, then it's also true that cursed are those who are not abiding in His Word.

James writes that **anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.**

In today's Old Testament lesson, God insisted that Moses stay on the mountain in His presence for 40 days and nights, that he neither eat nor drink during this time of testing and processing the assignment that lay before him.

Peter urges us in today's Epistle lesson to pay attention to the voice from heaven until the morning star rises in our hearts. Dear friends, Jesus is the Morning Star who will rise up in our hearts as often as we drown the old sinful adam with all of its nastiness by way of sincere repentance.

In his book, *Joining Jesus on His Mission*, Greg Finke devotes a chapter to each of five missional practices - 1) seeking the kingdom, 2) hearing from Jesus, 3) talking with people, 4) doing good, and 5) praying with people.

On the subject of hearing from Jesus, he offers four tips

1. Use the early morning to listen to Jesus in the Gospels
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, your ears, and your heart to what Jesus wants to give you today.
3. Take your time and let the Spirit of Jesus bless you and wrestle with you.
4. Ask Jesus a simple question, "What would you have me believe and do as a result of your words today."

The kingdom of God is like a congregation full of folks who have their bad days, their ok days, and their good days.

- On their bad days, they make the mistake of not hearing from Jesus.
- On their ok days, they study about what Jesus did and said.
- On their good days, they are like a wise man who built his house on the rock - they hear the Words of Jesus and put them into practice.
- On every day, they are the dearly loved, precious, forgiven children of God.