



Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Transfiguration of our Lord

God says: "Listen to Him!"

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach



The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 17,1-9:

- ^{ESV} ¹ And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
- ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.
- ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

• ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

- ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.
- ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."
- ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.
- ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will hear the Word of God, see the Glory of Christ, and follow Him, through suffering to Glory! Amen.*

• **Dear Israel of God!**

- It must have been quite exciting to be one of the first disciples of Christ! To drop your tools of the fishermen trade and to follow the Messiah, of all people!
- There was this idea that the messiah would bring peace to all the nations, a worldwide peace, political peace, so to speak. To be able to accomplish this, he would need to be physically and mentally strong to submit all nations under his power. Of course the state of Israel would rule with him. The reign of the Romans would stop.
- So the general idea of what this messiah would come and do was: He would be a hero of God. A hero takes up the fight and conquers the evil. He makes the bad guys loose and the good ones reign with him. And a hero, like in the movies, almost dies fighting, but in the end he is strong enough to come out on top!
- So, when John the Baptist arrived with his strange clothing and baptising people, he generated incredible activity and excitement in Judea with his message "*Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". Many must have thought, John is announcing the Day of the Lord. The restoration of Israel has come. Many thought and hoped that John was right!
- But, then the first bad news hit them, John was killed by Herod! Was John wrong after all?

Why didn't God protect His servant John? John didn't manage to conquer evil. He was overcome by evil, murdered! What a dreadful end! If you look at his end, it didn't seem like God was with him!

- Then Jesus appeared in Galilee, calling disciples, and taking up the same proclamation as John the Baptist, *"Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* Jesus confirmed this message with many mighty signs. He healed the sick of all types of sicknesses. So, things seemed to be back on track again with this Jesus doing all those mighty works. Hopes were up and especially Peter was becoming a zealous follower of the messiah, ready to conquer the world, ready to take on any resistance! Jesus once send them out on a training trip and they experienced the most amazing things. They could drive out the demons and they could heal the sick from any sickness. They could even raise people from the dead! Wow, these are truly unheard of things!

- We get the picture, the disciples soon became people with what we would call 'celebrity status'! They were the disciples of Jesus, the chosen ones! The only thing that didn't quite fit was the unexpected death of John.

- This restlessness grew when Jesus started to speak about having to die Himself and rise on the third day- now that doesn't fit the messiah who needs to conquer the world, at all. He needs to be strong. He must take on the oppressive Roman Empire. That is why being the Son of God would be fitting. He would need every power He could lay His hands on to conquer the world.

- When Jesus announced His coming death for the first time, Peter did something really crazy, he rebuked his Lord! He said, ^[Mt 16:22] *"Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."* That is when Jesus said, ^[23-24] *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

- From the perspective of a zealous disciple of the Messiah this was a very bitter pill to swallow!

- But soon afterwards came this wonderful experience where Jesus took Peter, James and John onto the mountain top where Jesus was transfigured. His glory was revealed to them. Light was radiating from His Body! It was the same Body, but now they saw, there was more to His Body than there is to our body. Elijah and Moses appeared next to Jesus and they were having a conversation with Jesus. Both Moses and Elijah once met the LORD God on a mountain. What an Epiphany! Jesus was literally radiating light from His body and clothes and Moses, representative of the Law of God, and Elijah representative of the Prophets were conversing with Jesus! What a wonderful conversation that must have been! What a place to be, what a privilege to be taken to this mountain top of God!

- But then something truly disturbing happened: During this heavenly conversation someone couldn't keep his mouth shut, but started to babble his nonsense into the conversation! He had this great idea, suddenly everything made sense to him! He just had

to share it! He said, "*Lord, it is good that we are here.*" So far so good. Then it comes, Peter's own interpretation of what was happening: "*If you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*" What's wrong with this suggestion of Peter? Or we can also ask, what is wrong with Peter's interpretation of what he had seen? He had seen the wonderful appearance of Jesus, of which we can only dream of to experience, but he still got the meaning of it completely wrong! He didn't get it, although he experienced it. The Epiphany alone was not enough. We sinful human beings always need something that will clarify what we are seeing. And that is we need God's Word to tell us what is actually going on. We cannot trust our own senses when it comes to the things of God!

- Peter got it completely wrong, because this whole Epiphany of Christ was revealed to him, to John and James, to proclaim to them that Jesus is the one Elijah and Moses spoke to on the mountain in OT times! He is the LORD! Both the Law of God and the Prophets proclaim and point to Jesus as being the centre and fulfilment of the Holy Scriptures. If you take Jesus out of the OT Scriptures the golden thread, which keeps everything together, would be lost! He is the new temple of God. Moses and Elijah are not worthy to have their own temples! They only reflect the light of God whilst Jesus Himself radiates light from His Body! He is the true temple of God.

- This is absolutely clarified by a voice coming from the outside of Peter, from the clouds overshadowing them, the voice of God the Father Himself: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.*"

- Dear congregation, these are such simple and plain words, but they divide heaven from hell. We should not listen to Elijah speaking on his own, nor Moses speaking on his own, nor should we listen to the babbling of pastors although they may have made whatever great experience. We should not listen to the Law of God and the prophecies of God in isolation without the input of Christ. They will only be heard in truth if they are heard in conversation with Christ and with Christ leading the conversation. Therefore, we should hear Christ.

- The literal, real and true understanding of the OT Scriptures is Christ. The story of Israel was written down for us, says Paul, so that we will not stumble as they did. So, the whole story of Israel in the OT is a foreshadow of the Body of Christ, the Church. It is fulfilled in Christ. I mention this so deliberately because so many Christians deny this in our days. They basically run on Peter's idea of having more than one temple of God next to each other. One for the national state of Israel and one for Christ. But, God makes a very clear statement here. Listen to Christ! He is building the new temple and nobody else. Any other temples are false temples. They are not God's temple. Therefore, they must be temples of satan. Listen to Christ!

- This refers especially to the saying which troubled Peter and the rest so much, namely that Christ would need to suffer and die and be resurrected on the third day. Basically, what happened to John the Baptist, was also going to happen to Christ! No, Christ would

not remain on the mountain where Peter liked it so much, not then. The true Messiah for the Jews and the Gentiles climbed down from the mountain and headed towards Calvary.

- There, all the dreams and ideas of all heroic types of messiahs, which the disciples and people had at that stage, would be completely shattered and crucified. Peter would go so far as to deny the true Messiah three times! That is what happens if we are stuck in our narrow-mindedness about Christ, if we make up our own theology of what we see.
- Maybe the word of the cross of Christ troubles us not that much as it did Peter and his fellow disciples in those days, because we know the outcome. We know how the story continues. However, what certainly troubles Christians of our times very much is the fact that those who follow Christ also experience suffering and cross in their lives! This is part and parcel of the Way of Christ. Jesus said so Himself, [16,24-25] *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* So, the heroic, celebrity style discipleship of Christ is a false way.
- Since our Baptism, Christ has placed us on His way. And His way goes through many storms, many afflictions, sicknesses, suffering and finally also death. In Baptism our own life, our old Adam is crucified, he is dead in God’s eyes. And for the rest of the time on earth, this old self of mine is going to loose control and power, slowly but surely.
- But, this is not a tragedy. This is the Way of Christ which leads to exceptional Glory! Our old Adam still clings to us, but we have become new beings in Christ. We have been born from above. He begins something new in us. And this new being is a new Adam in Christ, with spirit and body. And this new being learns new things, the things of Christ. This being receives and learns to give mercy, receives and gives forgiveness of sins and we begin to realise what truly makes us happy, what truly gives us joy. We begin to learn that all these things which we are loosing, our old life in sin, was a life filled with emptiness. Now, in our baptismal life, our external existence may be a life surrounded by many sorrows, and yet we have a Lord who comes to us and says, [7] *“Rise, and have no fear!”* Remember what God said, *“Listen to Him!”* And so we rise, we take Christ at His Word and there goes the fear for this life and for death. He is here, so who can be against us? Who can separate us from His Word of Grace, from His promise, from His Baptism? He is Lord of all. Nobody can do it.
- And thus we will soon go down from the mountain top into the valleys of our communities, not to celebrate our own life or to only grab how much we can get out of it, but to look around and see where does someone need help. Where does someone need the mercy of God, Christ’s forgiveness, where does someone need to hear the Law of God, where is someone stuck in sin and needs deliverance from sin. We have such a wonderful message to the world. Go out and tell them and have no fear! **Amen.**
- *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. [Phil 4,7].*