**Mark 9:2-9** February 14, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Transfiguration Sunday

*Mark 9:2Jesus 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. 3His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.*

*5Peter 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.” 6(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) 7Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” 8Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.*

*9As 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.*

**When You See Something You Weren’t Supposed to See**

Dear Friends in Christ,

You can’t believe your eyes, but there it is on Instagram (or Facebook if you are over 40). It makes you raise your eyebrows, “I can’t believe they posted that!” You tell a couple friends about it. But by the time they get there, the post has been deleted. To someone it had seemed like a good idea at the time, but on second thought, not so much.

Usually, when you see something people don’t want you to see—when they delete the post or rip the picture out of your hand—what you have seen for that split second is something compromising and ugly, something that opens the curtains on somebody’s soul, and the sight isn’t pretty.

But sometimes—sometimes—something totally different is at work. Sometimes the thing you aren’t supposed to see is something good, even amazingly good, maybe even too good.

It was a picture I wasn’t supposed to see. But there I was, a high schooler idly chomping on breakfast cereal at my grandparents’ house in central Minnesota. In the quiet that often accompanies breakfast, I was looking at the small crowded bulletin board above the table. That’s where my grandparents posted all kinds of things like bills, grocery lists, and their favorite *Frank and Ernest* cartoons. Almost buried under the clippings I noticed a picture of a house, or it looked more like a modest apartment building, of maybe four or six or eight apartments. No people in the picture, just the front of an apartment building. Very plain, very strange. I thought, “There must be something special about that place if G&G have a picture of it.” I could not guess what it might be, so I asked grandpa. “Oh, it’s just an apartment building in Milwaukee.” I knew that he and grandma had lived in Milwaukee when first married back in the 1940’s. “Is that the first place you lived after you got married?” I asked. “No, it’s just an apartment building.” “Oh.” He volunteered no more. One didn’t ask probing questions of grandpa, so I let it lie. Apparently, there *was* something special about that apartment, but I wasn’t supposed to know about it.

Now, you have to understand my grandparents. Every year they got us grandkids (and they only had us three) a Christmas present. They were always nice presents, but they were very modest, not the way many grandparents do. That’s how everything was with them. You see, they didn’t want a relationship based on net worth and awesome Christmas presents. They wanted their grandchildren to love them for who they were. Only later did they want us to find out about the other stuff, like the fact that they owned that apartment building. That was quite a surprise when I finally found out!

Sometimes we aren’t supposed to see things, not because *the things* are *bad*, but because *we* are not ready to understand *how good* they are.

With that thought, we also think of the last verse of our reading—after the Transfiguration, ***“Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen.”*** It’s almost like they weren’t supposed to have seen it. Jesus gave strict orders to his three awe-struck disciples to tell no one, no-where, no-how about what had just happened, at least not for a long time. The problem wasn’t what they had seen. The problem was that they weren’t ready. They were lacking a key piece of information.

Now let’s be clear. These three were not lacking the information because Jesus hadn’t tried to tell them. Not at all. In fact, if you have a Bible open in front of you to Mark chapter 9, just go back a few sentences. There Jesus gave them the missing piece. He spoon-fed it to them. He talked slowly. He didn’t use big words. *“He spoke plainly about this… that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”* (8:31-32) Jesus had tried to prep them for the Transfiguration. But you probably remember what Peter did at that point. Peter took him aside and told Jesus he was talking crazy talk. At which point the Teacher had no choice but issue the most succinct rebuke of the Bible, *“Get behind me, Satan!”* The teacher had tried to get the students ready, but they would have nothing of it. In their love affairs with the power and status of this world they didn’t want to hear what Jesus was really about.

Now, up on the mountain, a week later, it was the same thing, if a bit more innocent. They saw the glory of Jesus, heard the voice from the glowing cloud, witnessed Moses and Elijah, and Peter wanted that glory to last and last, not to end. Personally, I think it was more ignorance than willfulness that inspired Peter to want to build three shelters up there. It’s understandable. But it was completely wrong-headed. It was based on a misunderstanding of why Jesus had come, a misunderstanding of what made the Son of God so special and important. They wanted this glory to be the story; the beginning, middle and end. “Forget about that suffering stuff, Jesus!”

So, after the glorious transformation up on the mountaintop, after seeing their teacher put the sun to shame with his glowing appearance, after viewing Moses and Elijah summoned to his side, after hearing the voice of God thunder from a glowing cloud, after seeing perhaps the most amazing sight human eyes have ever seen, Jesus tells them, *“Don’t tell anyone what you have seen!”* (Mt 17:9). Can you imagine? We post photos of our food because we think a hamburger is so awesome others just gotta know. Silly cat videos get a million likes. These disciples have witnessed a reality from another universe are told, “Keep this under your hats for a while. Tell no one.”

It’s almost like they had seen something they weren’t supposed to see. Except of course, they were supposed to see it. That’s why Jesus had invited them up there. But they weren’t ready to understand it just yet. They lacked one key bit of information.

What was that information? It is hinted at in Jesus’ command, ***“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.”*** *That* is the rest of the story they needed to know in order to understand the Transfiguration.

They had seen Jesus’ glory, but they were ignorant of the other half: Jesus’ suffering and shame. This is such an important truth that cannot be overstated. You cannot understand the glory of Jesus without the cross and the grave. If you like the healing miracles Jesus did, but you don’t want to think about the punishment Jesus endured on the cross for your daily sins, Jesus doesn’t want you to say anything about him. If you think Jesus taught the greatest moral code humanity has ever heard, but don’t really buy into the fact that we are saved by God’s grace instead of obeying that moral code, Jesus says, “Keep quiet.” You’ll do nothing but spread disinformation. If you want to spend all your time enjoying life in this world and want to minimize or dismiss Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and our resurrection from the dead, Jesus says, “Don’t even bother. Keep your mouth shut.” It all goes together: the glory and the shame, the might and the sacrifice.

Without the cross and the empty tomb, we human beings misunderstand everything else about Jesus. In fact, we understand nothing about Jesus or God.

But *with* the cross and grave, Jesus’ transfiguration transforms us also. When we see Jesus in his glory, knowing also the key bit of information that Peter, James and John lacked at that moment in their lives, we embody the joyful light that the Apostle Paul spoke of in our Epistle reading. There he said, *“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*

God shows his great glory when the Holy Spirit speaks to you the whole story about Jesus. We are transformed when with Spirit-given faith we confess the Scripture truths encapsulated in the Nicene Creed that we confess every other week, “I believe in Jesus Christ… God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God… incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again.” Knowing and trusting that truth, you cannot help but be a shining beacon in world you inhabit.

You have a hope that is not discouraged and trampled by the politics of this or the last election cycle. Christ has called us to bigger things than that. Whether you scoff at the pandemic or shake in fear before it, you realize your hope in Jesus far outspans the reach of any disease. You strive to be lights in dark times, to reach out even when there are so many restrictions, to give hope when so many are discouraged and fed up.

You know that in your limited time in a fallen world, you may, like Jesus Christ, have to suffer. Events and things will distress us. Yet you know that when you look in the human yet glorified face of Christ Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration you have seen God.

This reading is well placed here in the Christian church year. Today is the last Sunday, the last worship service, of the season of Epiphany. In Epiphany the true identity of Jesus is shown to the world. The core readings of the Epiphany season revolve around three events in Jesus’ life. The first is when the Magi from the East came, led by a star, to worship one born King of the Jews—King from birth. The second event was Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River when the Father and Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be the Son of God. The third is this, where his Sonship is confirmed, his divine glory seen, and his words declared authoritative. Each is a key revelation of who Jesus is.

And now, in three short days, we will descend into the valley of sorrow with the arrival of Ash Wednesday. Transfiguration is a reminder that the path to Calvary was not some sort of unforeseen circumstance, a detour on the Savior’s planned journey to glory, something outside his control. No, it is his chosen path, and while you will see him suffering in the next seven weeks, never forget what you have seen with Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

I guess you could say that the theme of this sermon is a little misleading. It’s not that the disciples weren’t supposed to see Jesus in glory on that mountaintop. At the time, it must have almost felt forbidden when Jesus ordered them to not tell anyone. But for us who have seen and known and believed not only the glory, but also the sorrowful sacrifice, and the joyful resurrection, we have the information those three lacked at that moment. Our knowledge, our joy is the same as that of Peter, James and John and the other disciples, not on the Mount of Transfiguration, but half a year later, when they spoke and ate with Jesus, mission accomplished, Son of God, risen from the dead. Amen.