

TRANSFIGURATION: A TIME OF STRENGTHENING

That strengthening came: I. Before the Lord's Passion and it comes II. During our earthly lives.

Our Wednesday morning Women's Bible study group is currently reading through the book of Psalms. Some interesting facts about the book... it is the largest book with 150 Psalms. It contains the largest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119 has 176 verses. What's unique about Psalms is that it covers the whole gamut of human emotion. It was written by human beings like you and me who personally experienced those emotions, men like David and his music directors, Ethan the Ezrahite, the sons of Korah and Asaph, his own son Solomon, even Moses wrote one Psalm, Psalm 90. In vs10 Moses shares those emotions, "The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet the best of them is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." No matter where you are in those 70-80 years you can agree, they are filled with sorrow and trouble. But as Christians, we know what's waiting for us at the end of that time; a home where there is no trouble or sorrow, no disease or death, no temptation or struggle with sinful nature. We know, most importantly, that we will live forever with our Savior who redeemed us from all sin and death. Until we reach that home, we need strength to get through the seventy or eighty years of trouble and sorrow. The transfiguration of Jesus does just that.

How do you adequately describe the look of joy on a father's face and the tears of joy streaming down a mother's cheeks in the delivery room... unless you've been there? How does one adequately describe the sunrise as it creeps over the ocean and the feeling of the white sand between your toes... unless you've been there? How does one adequately describe the transfiguration of Jesus? It's something no has seen.

"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." There's not much more to be said. Imagine the scene for a moment! All the brilliance of Jesus' divinity, which he had hidden since his incarnation – revealed to three privileged men. But it got better! In this brilliance two Old Testament heroes, Moses and Elijah, joined Jesus. It was such a beautiful sight that Peter, James and John wanted it to never end. Peter said to Jesus, **'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'** Then a bright cloud enveloped them and a divine voice, the voice of the heavenly Father, said, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** The voice was so glory-filled that it sent the three disciples facedown to the ground. And then it was over. Only Jesus remained to touch the three and say to them, **"Get up. Don't be afraid."** This event was for the disciples, just as much as it was for Jesus' benefit.

Consider... in six short months Jesus would find himself on another mount, of Olives, in a garden grove, betrayed by a friend, arrested, abandoned, falsely accused, sentenced to death, mocked, beaten. He would suffer and die by crucifixion. And Jesus knew all this. Like a surgeon telling you exactly what she's going to do to your body to fix it, doesn't always make it any easier for you as you pass out under the anesthesia. Through the prophets, Jesus knew exactly what was coming, and it wasn't just the physical torture... it was the emotional, psychological and spiritual suffering.

Satan's temptations would come through enticements from the Jewish leaders, "Come down from cross, and prove yourself!" The weight of knowing that he was innocent, yet he would have to bear in his soul the guilt of a whole world of sinful human beings, many who would even reject his gift of salvation. He knew that he would be forsaken by his own Father so that world would not be forsaken by him. True man yet true God, stripped of his might upon the cross.

This is the paradox, that the God, who by the power of his mouth set the world in motion, who told the oceans, "This far you may come and no further," who could at any moment call down legions of angels to his rescue, sets aside that power upon the cross. He would hide his divinity so that no one looking at him would say, "That is the Son of God."

That's exactly why the transfiguration was necessary to strengthen Christ. We hear it in the conversation with Moses and Elijah. Luke tells us they were talking about his departure. Luke uses the Greek word, *exodus*." Moses led the exodus of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land. Jesus would soon be the leader of the exodus from the slavery of sin into the promised land of heaven. This exodus would happen by way of the cross. This is his strength... this opportunity to speak with these two men, representatives of the entire group of Old Testament believers who were looking forward to Christ as their hope and expectation. Through the prophets they understood that the promised Messiah would be stripped of might for a time so that he might strip Satan and death of their might forever, to rip power away from sin and the grave. Yes, this transfiguration was a time of strengthening for Jesus before his passion. This clothing of light upon the mountain was a preview of his victory, a taste of his resurrection glory. Jesus knows he will win. And so marches down the mountain toward Jerusalem with determination to win.

Not only was the transfiguration a strengthening for Jesus, but it is also a strengthening for us in our earthly lives. To see what it means for us, we need to understand what it meant for the disciples.

Consider what the disciples would see in the next six months. Jesus had already begun to prepare them for what was coming, but it did not make it any easier for them. In fact Peter at one point pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him saying, "No, Lord, this is not going to happen to the Messiah. Stop talking that way, Jesus." They would experience doubt. That disbelief is heard in their post-Easter Sunday morning conversations. Two disciples on the way to Emmaus said, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Is this the Messiah? We're not so sure. Look at him so helpless so pitiful. Where is the power we witnessed, which raised the dead, healed the sick, and sent devils running?

All doubt would scatter when they looked back on the awesome sight they witnessed on that mountain. The brilliance of Christ's glory and the voice of the Father would remind them, "Yes, Jesus still is God!" When they followed through with the Father's command, "Listen to him!" they would remember Jesus' words, "It is necessary that I go and suffer and die. Then I will rise again." Yes, of course! Jesus had to die. And now he is risen, just as he said he would! Jesus' words had confused them before. Now fulfilled, they were a source of strength for his disciples, especially considering what they would experience in the months and years to come.

What will you see in the next six weeks? I'm not talking about who will be crowned new Dancing with the Stars champion, who will be the next American Idol. I'm talking about Lent. Lent begins this Wednesday. Lent is a time to ponder the great passion of Christ winning salvation for us. Lent is a time for repentance. It is during Lent that people often give something up to reflect on what Christ gave up for them. Instead of giving

something up, what if we took something on? Like our sinful nature? What if we used lent to be brutally honest with ourselves and allow the law of God to dig its finger into the gapping wounds in our hearts, our favorite “pet” sins. What if we used this Lenten season to recognize those sins and to drown them through repentance? What if we would deny our desire to feed those sins and rather accept the will of God? What if we would take advantage of the extra worship opportunities that the Lenten season offers to run to our God for strength? Or will the next six weeks be like the past six weeks? Will we continue to deny God’s will for our own? Will we make excuses why it’s so much easier to stay home than be in God’s house? Will we give up like we so often do instead of fighting the desires of our sinful nature because it’s such a difficult task? It’s too hard. It’s too much of a commitment! What will I see in the next six weeks? Disappointment in myself, the same struggle against the influence of my sinful nature. Do we need strength?

That’s why we’re here at this mountain today! That’s why we will come back to it! Here we see our Savior do what we struggle so hard to do and fail so miserably. We go back to the mountain to see Christ’s glory, for we have none of our own. His glory is found in the Father’s words, “With him I am well pleased.” “He has done everything I’ve asked him to do.” That is our strength. Through faith, we receive Christ’s perfect life of obedience, perfect in everyway.

That’s why this lent you I will come to this mountain, i.e. we will come to the Word of God, to receive the work Jesus won for us. That’s the blessing God gives you when you come to hear his Word and receive his body and blood. Through these means of grace, faith receives strength to take sin on. Faith receives power to rise up and tackle the sinful nature. Faith trusts in Jesus for help against the struggle with temptation. Faith is strengthened, because faith sees Jesus’ preview to victory in his transfiguration.

Our human minds see the paradox: Jesus promises eternal glory, but, before we get there, he promises that we will pass through seventy or eighty years filled with trouble and sorrow. Faith trusts in that promise, and looks back to the transfiguration of Jesus as a preview of his victory over the grave. Faith see his empty tomb as a preview of our empty graves. Faith looks back to the transfiguration of Jesus as a preview of his glorious appearance on the Last Day. Faith looks ahead and sees you on the Last Day, clothed in his glory, holy and perfect forever and ever. That’s why we will travel through lent and return to the mountain and cross and the empty tomb, for there is our strength and hope for the future.

Next time we meet I will trade in my white alb in for a black cassock, my white stole for a purple stole, the paraments on the altar and pulpit will be purple, colors for mourning and repentance. We will walk with Jesus to the cross, so that we may behold an awesome sight; the payment for our sins! And as we do, we will always look back and remember what we saw today, and say, “How awesome it is to be here!” A taste of what we will enjoy in six weeks; Easter Sunday... a taste of what we will enjoy in eternity. Truly, how good it is to be here, Lord. Amen.