

Transfiguration Sunday – Year A – March 2, 2014 Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Based on 2Peter 1:16-21 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“Confidence Before the Cross”

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Can you imagine it? It's difficult to even put it into words! How do I describe this? You had to be there! You've seen and experienced things so spectacular that they're hard to put into words – and I'm not talking about the top ten sports highlights on ESPN. There will always be those “Wow” moments, the college basketball team that comes from behind to win the NCAA tournament. The Olympic record broken by a hundredth of a second. No, I'm talking about those once in a lifetime experiences you've had personally. I've hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and spent five nights down there. There's something amazing about waking up in the morning to see the sun peaking over the lip of the canyon, and to watch the light crawl through the canyon, filling it with light. Being in the delivery room for the birth of a child, holding your child for the first time, hearing their first cry. Standing on the border of the United States and Canada and hearing the thundering noise of Niagara Falls as water crashes 176 feet to the rocks below - spectacular! Standing on top of the Empire State Building and seeing the lights of New York - spectacular!

When I read our First Lesson this morning, the account of Moses on Mount Sinai, and tried to picture it... how do you put that into words? Picture Moses and 2 million Israelites camped around the base of Mount Sinai as it rises 7,500ft into the sky from the desert floor. A giant dark cloud descends on the mountain, and what looks to be a consuming fire, but that fire doesn't burn any of the trees or bushes. The ground shakes, thunder rolls continuously – this is the glory of the LORD.

Why did the LORD manifest himself this way? Because he knew what the people would face. They had a difficult road ahead of them. God would command these people to march into the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, and attack city after city, and drive out the heathens. Their armies would be larger than the Israelite army, they would be stronger, they would have more combat experience, their walls well fortified. He told them, “Go and take possession of the land.” This was the cross the people of Israel had to bear. They had to face what appeared to be the impossible and trust that God's promise to be with them and fight for them. They had to trust that promise, even though it defied human logic.

Yet what did the Israelites do? They forgot that awesome sight, they complained, they were afraid, and they doubted the LORD's promise to save them. They lost confidence before the cross.

In our lesson today, the apostle Peter saw that same glory from the same LORD. He had stood on the banks of the Jordan River, and watched as a man waded into its waters. He watched John the Baptist baptize this man, and then wide-eyed he saw heaven tear open the sky and the glory of the LORD pour out from heaven upon the waters of the river. He saw a dove descend upon this man. He heard a divine voice thunder from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well-pleased."

He saw more glory from this man. Peter watched Jesus heal those who had incurable diseases. He witnessed Jesus raise the dead. He heard his teaching that had authority. He knew that this man was the Son of God. He could trust that what he said was true and he could put confidence in this God-Man. One time Peter and his companions were in boats crossing the Sea of Galilee, they suddenly found themselves caught in an awful, life-threatening storm. They looked out on the water and saw a man, walking on the water. It was Jesus! Peter called out and said, "If it's you, Jesus, tell me to come to you!" Here he was, a mere mortal, defying the laws of gravity, walking on water. But then, he saw the waves, he heard the wind, and he had to cry out to Jesus and Jesus had to grab him by the hand. Peter was the one who gave a beautiful confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" But then when Jesus started talking about the cross, Peter said, "No, Jesus, stop talking about the cross!" Peter was the one who was so bold to stand up and proclaim, "I will go to die with you, Lord!" yet that very evening, he denied that he even knew Jesus of Nazareth, shortly before his Lord was led off to die.

His selfish weakness, the doubt, the worry, the anxiety, he forgot what Jesus had said. He forgot what he had seen. He forgot who Jesus is. Peter lost confidence before the cross.

I was speaking to someone in the community just last week, discussing my move to Georgia. They said, "Your congregation is going to fall apart after you leave. That's what happened to ours." I said, "Thanks a lot. That's reassuring." Another person asked me, "What happens when you get down to Georgia and you find you're a not a good fit, you don't mesh with the people, and the ministry there doesn't flourish like it did here, then what?" I said, "Thanks a lot. That's reassuring." These are the demons that swirl around your brain and in your heart while a pastor deliberates a call, while he's packing up his house and his family. Some of you have shared similar thoughts with me, "What will happen here at Faith? Who will serve our spiritual needs? Who will come and hold my hand while I'm lying in the hospital? Who will come and build on what's been accomplished here? Will the congregation struggle and falter?" Have we forgotten what we have seen and heard in Jesus? Have we forgotten what he has promised? Why we doubt him? Why we fail to put all of our trust and all of our hope in his promises? Have we forgotten who he is? Have we lost confidence before the cross?

But then Peter takes me back to the mountain, "**We did not follow clearly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses.**" Peter reminds me that he saw this happen. He saw the glory of Jesus on that mountain. He heard with his own ears God the Father's words "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased.**" Yes, the Father was pleased with Jesus because he did everything well. Unlike you and me, he had confidence before the cross. He knew what was waiting for him - the cross with all of its ugliness, the ugliness of your fear, your doubts, your forgetfulness - he knew what was waiting for him: the pain in his body and soul, the cruel mocking, the sound of scourging, the pounding of nails, the gasping breath. These are sounds that you will hear soon during Lent, which begins this Wednesday. But they are sounds that we must hear, because then we are reminded why Jesus went to the cross.

He did this to earn forgiveness for Peter, for you and for me. He did this so you know how much he loves you, that he would take your place on the cross, under God's wrath, in the flames of hell, and die, so you will always know that he did everything that he needed to do, to save you from your sins, from God's wrath, from hell itself, even though it meant going to the cross.

And this scene on the mountain puts the cross into perspective. Jesus displayed all of that glory for the sake of the disciples and for you and me. This happened so that when Peter and the disciples saw Jesus humbled and despised and rejected, hanging on a cross, he is still God. He still has all the power. He will keep his promises, even in death.

That's why Peter wrote, **"We have the words of the prophets made more certain."** Through the prophets of old, God had prophesied that the Savior would be led like a lamb to the slaughter, that he would be rejected, he would take the transgressions of the world on himself (Isaiah 53). Through the prophets of old God told the world that the Savior would rise again and swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:8). Jesus went with confidence to the cross, knowing that God's promises would be kept, and they would be kept for the sake of sinners like Peter, like you and me. So that when we think about how we have doubted, when we reflect on those times we lost confidence, we will always know with confidence, that God has forgiven us through Jesus.

We know with confidence that the words of the prophets were not their own ideas and thoughts that they penned. Peter then said, **"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** Some people say that this book is duty old relic, filled with fantasy stories and fables, created by men to make people feel good. The author of this book says otherwise. He says that all of the words, every single stroke of the pen, were given by him to men. God breathed every word into these men who then copied down what God wanted to say to his people, not just at that particular time in history, but these words are what God wants to say to all people of all time, until he comes again.

This means that you can trust God's Words, his words are truth, they are absolute truth, and, just as he is eternal, his words will stand forever. And his words have meaning and purpose ...

Peter wrote, **"And you will do well to pay attention to it,** (that is, these words of the prophets), **as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."** God-willing the lights won't go out today with the approaching winter storm. If they do, and you're sitting in your dark house, you know how important light is. The beam from your flashlight shows you the way through your home so you don't trip and fall. You pay attention to light when you're in a dark place. Peter here is saying that the words of the prophets from the Bible are like that light, and it's good for you to pay attention to them. When you're in a dark place, emotionally, spiritually, physically, pay attention to these words from God, who promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6) "I have swallowed up death forever." (1Corinthians 15:54) "I will make all things work for good of those who love me." (Romans 8:28) "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me." (Psalm 50:15)

Peter encourages you to continue to pay attention to that light **"until the day dawns and morning star rises in your hearts."** The morning star, that would be the planet Jupiter that shone in the eastern sky this morning, isn't it? But that's not what Peter was talking about. That bright morning star is Jesus. The day that dawns is

the day that bright morning star will shine on this earth again in glory, with all of his angels, and by the power of his word will bring your dead bodies out of their graves, and you will be transformed, and live forever with him, and you and I will shine with the glory of Christ.

Peter wrote these words to a congregation to give them confidence before the cross. Jesus had revealed to Peter that soon he would die, he would leave this world, and it wasn't going to be a peaceful death. Peter had to face the cross, too. But these words would give him confidence before the cross. He knew that the pain and suffering would end, and that he would soon be with his Savior. He wrote these words to comfort the readers of his letter. Peter wanted them to know, that even though they would face the cross, too, perhaps in different ways, through persecutions and hardships, they would have confidence, knowing that God's promise of the resurrection of the dead, applied to them. It was a promise that would be kept, a promise that would give them confidence before the cross.

You and I, we have a hard road ahead of us. Both of us will go through some big changes in the next weeks and months. But some things will not change: the eternal word of God, which will be proclaimed by faithful pastors, the distribution of the Lord's Supper, the administration of holy baptism, and the promises that God makes to you through them. God will still be God. Jesus will still retain the glory. And one day he will bring us together in the glories of heaven. I want you to know these things so that you will always have confidence before the cross. Amen.