



Festival of Transfiguration – February 18-20, 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: A Glimpse of Glory to Guard Against Days of Doubt

Sermon Text: Mark 9: 2-9

² After six days Jesus 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. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter 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.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. ⁹ 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.

Dear Christian friends,

Just this past Tuesday, our country celebrated Valentine's Day. Maybe you celebrated this Hallmark Holiday with special cards, candy or flowers.

But, have you ever wondered where the tradition of Valentine's Day began? It seems that it started back in ancient Rome some 200 years after Christ was born. The Roman emperor Claudius was having trouble recruiting men for his army. He believed the reason Roman men didn't want to serve is because they didn't want to leave their families or girlfriends. So to solve his recruitment problem, the emperor decreed that all upcoming engagements and weddings in Rome were officially cancelled. You can imagine how well that went over with the good people of Rome (not very well). One person in particular, a Roman priest named Valentinus began secretly marrying couples at his parish in defiance of the emperor's orders. Like it usually does, word got back to the emperor who had Valentinus arrested and scheduled for execution. On the morning of his death, February 14th 269 AD – legend has it that Valentinus was able to slip a farewell note to the jailer's daughter with whom he had fallen in love. The love note was signed: "... from your Valentine" So the custom of sending love notes on February 14th was born.

It's safe to say Valentine's Day has stood the test of time. And I think that's because all of us want to know what's going on in another's heart: We love the flowers, cards, and candy on Valentine's Day because those gifts offer a glimpse into the heart of the giver.

Our sermon reading for this Festival of Transfiguration doesn't talk about Valentine's Day. But, this event does offer a glimpse into the heart of our Savior God. Soon troubling events were going to happen in the ministry of Jesus that would cause His disciples to experience doubt, worry, and fear. So to prepare them of what lay ahead, Jesus took three of them on a long walk up a mountain where they would receive a glimpse of His glory. This glimpse would burn in their memories and future generations ... to lift them and us from this world to the next. So on this Transfiguration Sunday, God gives us in Mark chapter nine, a **Glimpse of Glory to Guard Against Days of Doubt**.

Maybe you've found that taking a good long walk helps to clear the mind. It's a chance to get away for a while – to recharge your emotional and mental batteries. In our sermon reading, the disciples needed some time away. That's because following Jesus was becoming increasingly more difficult. Oh, sure, there were moments of victory. Like when Jesus had asked His followers: **Who do you say that I am?** Peter answered for all of them: **You are the Christ – the Son of the Living God.** What a beautiful confession of faith. Through His preaching and teaching, His healing and loving, God had convinced them of Jesus' identity: as the Son of God and the son of man – the God-man. Now, it was time to convince them why He came. We're told in Matthew 16:21: **From that time on, Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** How confusing this must have been for the disciples. Here they were walking and talking with Jesus about the mighty kingdom of God. Now they hear about death and seeming defeat. They would soon learn it's not always parties and parades when you're a Christian. Peter took Jesus to the proverbial woodshed to try to talk some sense into Him. Matthew tells us that conversation didn't go very well: **Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter: "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men." Then Jesus said to His disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16).** Sometimes it's easier to tell God what to do, instead of listening to what He wants us to do. What an easy mistake to make!

So it was time to get away. Jesus took His disciples on a walk up a mountain to strengthen their faith to face another mountain named Calvary. Listen to the details: **² After six days Jesus 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. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.** St. Mark offers us a glimpse of Jesus' glory. Jesus was transfigured before them, that is, His appearance totally changed. His face, body, clothes, His whole being began to shine with the brilliance of the noon-day sun. Through this spectacular metamorphosis, Jesus' true identity as God, which was normally hidden since His birth at Bethlehem began to shine through.

But, other glorious sights were seen that day. Peter, James, and John were eye-witnesses. Two great heroes of the Old Testament were talking with Jesus. One was Moses. He's the man God chose to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land. The other was Elijah. God's chose the prophet Elijah who helped turn Israel away from worthless idols to the worship of the true God. Two men who had foretold Jesus' coming were now conversing with Jesus about the deliverance He would bring at Jerusalem: deliverance from real sin and real death. Real deliverance that would come at the price of real sweat, blood, and death, all ending in resurrection.

Can you imagine how this glimpse of Jesus' glory affected the disciples? St. Mark tells us: ⁵ **Peter 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.)** You're familiar with the phrase: "Heaven on earth"? That's what Peter was seeing up close and personal. Everything that Peter and every Godly Jew hoped for in the coming Messiah was staring him in the face. All that he left his fishing business and family to see was now within arms' reach. Peter desperately wanted to hold on to this glimpse of glory.

I can relate to Peter, can't you? Deep down, like Peter, we want our connection with Christ to be full of mountaintop experiences. We often want our lives to be "heaven on earth" with our jobs, our school, our health and our family and we seem surprised (even shocked) when life doesn't work out that way. Deep down, like Peter we all want a version of Christianity that is all crown and no cross. Peter had it all planned out: Jesus would ride into Jerusalem and take his rightful place on the throne and all the disciples would be ruling right next to Him. And deep down, that picture looks pretty good to us. LORD, here's what I want and how I want it. And for that selfishness we too deserve to be dismissed forever and hear Jesus say to us: **"Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men."**

But, Peter had a loving, patient Savior, and so do we. Just think of what happened on that mountain! Peter kept sinking into self-service, and Jesus kept lifting him up. Peter kept focusing on His glory and Jesus kept showing him the cross. Peter kept coming up with his own big plans and Jesus kept showing him the perfect plan of salvation. And when we sink into self-service and days of doubt, thank God, He deals mercifully with us.

Wherever we go, brothers and sisters, whatever we do, the cross of Jesus needs to be here, front and center. The cross needs to be here as a constant reminder of the damning reality of our personal sins. The cross needs to be here as a constant symbol of agony Jesus endured for us to free us from the guilt and power of death, and hell. The cross needs to be here because only at the cross we are reminded: **"The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all our sins."** And the cross needs to be here as a symbol to motivate us to love God and others.

As quickly as this glimpse of glory began, it ended. St. Mark concludes: ⁷ ***Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"*** ⁸ ***Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.*** God endorsed His Son and His Son's mission to save the world from hell. And He clearly directs us to listen to him today. It's easy to focus all our attention on the mountain, on what was seen and heard. But, the real miracle was that Jesus came down from that mountaintop to resume His path of sorrows to make us right with God. When most people would abandon the hard path for the easy path, not Jesus. That's the Bible's message today of self-sacrifice and that's true love.

Valentine's Day has a way of showing where hearts are at. Cards and flowers might help erase some of the human doubts we have: does she love me or does she love me not? But, today, as we go up the Mountain of Transfiguration, may Jesus erase all our doubts and worries with a rock-solid faith. Thank God Jesus has offered us a Glimpse of His Glory to Guard Against Days of Doubt. Like the timeless hymn declares, LORD – it is good for us to be here. Amen.