

IT'S GOOD TO BE WITH JESUS

Matthew 17:1-9 Text vs. 4a *“Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”*”

Our lesson today makes it pretty clear *what* happened up on that mountain, and not so much *why* it happened. Jesus was giving His disciples a glimpse of who He really was. But it's about what happened *after* He revealed that He is Messiah. The savior of the world. The son of God! That He's the way, the truth, and the life. And when our text says, *“Jesus took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray”* it's showing Jesus prayed a lot. At special times in his life, He would go off somewhere to pray, alone. Then the next verse reads, *“As he was praying, the appearance of His face changed. His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”* His body, even His clothes become extremely bright. The Bible says, *“like a flash of lightning”*. His holiness was shining through His humanity!

Most of the time Jesus looked just like anyone else. If He were sitting beside you this morning, you wouldn't know it was Jesus. Not from his appearance, anyway. Most men today are unshaven. Or wear beards. But, if Jesus were sitting there beside you in His *Transfigured* form, you would know immediately who He was. It would be hard to miss Him in His *transfigured* form. So, our Scripture lesson tells you what happened that day. *“Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 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.” While He was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don't be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one, except Jesus.”* (Matthew 17:2-8)

So, it's good to know *why* the Transfiguration happened. When Jesus went up that mountain to pray, thoughts of His death were on his mind. He needed to reinforce His determination to complete His mission upon this Earth. You would think the Son of God didn't need strengthening. But remember, He was living in the flesh like you. He got tired. He got hungry. He suffered as you suffer. And He had to deal with doubts, just like you! One time He even said, *“let this cup be taken from Me.”* Though Jesus was God in the flesh, it was still difficult for Him to go ahead with His task. At the very least, He was uneasy about it. So, the Transfiguration was to strengthen Jesus. And when Moses and Elijah appeared on that mountain and stood beside Jesus, it meant Jesus was their successor. The Old Covenant was passing. Jesus bringing a New Covenant from God for all people. That's when God's voice was heard reassuring the disciples that even though Jesus must suffer, they must listen to Him, and obey Him. So, it's clear. God the Father helped God the Son be strengthened through the Glory of the Lord being renewed in Jesus. It would help Jesus say, with newfound strength, *“Not My will, but Your will be done!”*

Keep in mind now, Jesus is both True God, and True man. He didn't give up being God when He became human, even though He didn't always show Himself as God. But on this one day he did! Because without a doubt, Jesus knew He was the promised Messiah. That He was going to bring salvation for all. Later, when Jesus was arrested and put on trial, and eventually crucified, fear and doubts entered the hearts of the disciples. It almost wiped out their faith. And after Jesus died on the cross, they retreated to the Upper Room where they had the Last Supper with Jesus. They locked themselves in that room fearing they, too, would be arrested and killed. Repeatedly, Jesus had assured them, even though He would be put to death by His enemies He would, by the power of God, come back to life. He told them, *“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be mocked and flogged and crucified. And on the third day, He will be raised to life!”* (Matthew 20:18-19). The disciples didn't understand that! They didn't even ask Him to explain it! And when Jesus was put to death on the cross, they completely forgot what He had said. They were overcome with sorrow. They were discouraged. They were fearful. They had hoped Jesus would become a king. That He would unite all the people and drive out the despised Romans who occupied their country.

But His death brought an end to those hopes. However, what He had promised did come true! He was killed! And on the third day following His death, the tomb where His body had been laid was empty. The angel's words at His tomb were true. *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen!”* (Luke 24:5-6). Then Jesus began to appear, repeatedly, to His disciples to demonstrate beyond all doubt He had been raised from the dead. He went to them in the Upper Room. He appeared to over 400 who recognized Him. You can criticize the disciples for not believing Jesus' words. But how often have you failed to believe the promises God has given you through His Holy Word in the Bible? Ask God to open your eyes and the ears of your soul. Ask God to help you come to know His promises. Ask God to help you put your trust in His promises every day. Remember, *“He has given us His very great and precious promises.”* (2 Peter 1:4)

So, with the disciples having the Transfiguration of Jesus still in their memories and remembering the words of God the Father saying, *“This is my Son”*, you might ask *“Why did Jesus transfigure Himself before the three disciples?”* It was to give them strength for what would soon take place. Those disciples needed to remember. They needed to share with their fellow disciples what they just heard and saw. Even with their doubts, they needed to share the light of *hope*. That's when they became “prisoners of Hope,” just as you heard last week that Bishop Tutu said of himself, *“I am a prisoner of hope!”*

The Transfiguration happened for Jesus to give Him hope. The Transfiguration happened for the disciples to give them hope. But has The Transfiguration given you hope? It should!

As we get closer to the Season of Lent, which begins next Wednesday, February 22, we will again be remembering why Jesus died on the cross. We will again focus more on the suffering of Jesus during Lent than at any other time in the Christian church year. We will see Jesus betrayed by Judas, one of his own disciples. We will see Jesus on trial for His life before Herod. Herod Antipas. Tetrarch of Galilee. The one who sent Jesus to His crucifixion. We will see Jesus mocked, ridiculed, and spit upon by Roman soldiers. We will see Jesus nailed to a cross and left to die there. Not by accident. But according to a Plan. God's Plan! It was how God planned to deal with your sin. It was God's way of making forgiveness possible, for you. So, as with Peter, James and John, the Transfiguration was meant to strengthen not only *their* faith, but *your* faith as well, in Jesus as Messiah. Your Savior and Lord.

The dictionary says *metamorphosis* is an abrupt developmental change of an animal. A chrysalis changing from a cocoon into a butterfly. A tadpole changing into a frog. Billy Graham said another word for metamorphosis is "*transformation*." And the Bible has a lot to say about that. The word is "Transformation." The best-known verse about transformation is in Romans 12:2: "*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed.*" Think about being transformed. If you try to transform a pig, you're going to end up in failure. You see, pigs love mud. You can scrub a pig. You can spray perfume on a pig. You can put a ribbon around a pig's neck. You can bring a pig into your house. But when you turn that pig loose outside, he'll jump right into the first mud puddle he sees. Why? Because his nature has not changed. He's still a pig!

People try to change. That's good! But when God says you still need to change something besides your *lifestyle*, you need to have a *transformation* of your *heart*. And it's possible! Because when you come to Jesus, God's Holy Spirit is going to come to live inside you and change you. Your attitude will change. Your goals will change. Your habits will change. But that doesn't happen all at once! You're going to be spending the rest of your life learning what it means to follow Jesus. And to obey Him. If you believe in Jesus Christ, and you have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, you are now living for Him. You have been transformed! You are living a decent life. You are looking to the Lord for direction with every step you take. You're thinking differently. Your behavior has taken on Christlike qualities. Your "*nature*" has changed from your "*old*" self to your "*new*" self! You have found being a Christian is the greatest way to live your life.

Last Sunday was Superbowl Sunday. Starting this Wednesday, and over the next forty days, the church calendar calls us to a time we call *Lent*. Lent is observed by people in many ways. Some give up things like eating chocolate. Social Networking on cellphones. Alcohol. Twitter. Facebook. Meat. Sweets. Coffee. Fizzy drinks. Movies. Some fast. Some pray. Whatever! But try to make this Lent your spiritual Superbowl! Accept the offer made by Jesus to join His team and become one of His true followers. Jesus knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem. The disciples didn't! But now, because of God's Word, you know what happened. It was God's game plan. And unlike the disciples, you have a chance to get ready for the *game of life* through Christ. You've been offered a spot on His heavenly team. He has a training program for you. He's going to be your *Quarterback*. He's going to call the signals in your life. He's going to give you the ball when you will call upon His name asking for forgiveness.

And if you're searching for God's leadership in your life, Jesus offers you a chance to be in His Huddle. To study His Word. To share the plan of salvation with those sitting in the stands looking on. And after you're offered others an opportunity to follow God's plan in their life, He's more than willing, through His Holy Spirit, to explain His Playbook, the Holy Bible, to you. But life's more than a game! The disciples gained new insight into their lives through their mountaintop experience. Jesus told Peter, James, and John, "*Arise and do not be afraid.*" That's a promise!

When you join Jesus' team, you will be joining in the everlasting song, and will help crown Him Lord of all. It's called a "*heavenly touchdown*." You have nothing to fear but fear itself! So be on Jesus' Team. The victory will yours, for your life, when you put your life in your Coach's hand, the Almighty God. And the church says, Amen!