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Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Matthew 17:1-9

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Have you ever had a “mountain-top experience”?
Have you ever had such a spiritual rush, a surge in faith, an excitement that you can’t explain?
Have you ever gone to the top of a mountain with the Lord and not want to come down?

If you have, you know what I mean.

You know how difficult it is to come back to the “real world.”

You know how peaceful, exciting, and freeing it is to be on the mountain—
the wind in your face, no worries, just you and Jesus.

And yet you have to come down.

You have to try to take your experience,
make some sort of sense out of it,
and in your excitement, explain it to someone else.

And they either look at you like your crazy,
or they try to relate in a way that makes you want to say,
“No, you just don’t get it.”

When we have our mountain-top experiences, we have something that no one else has—
but we want them to have it,
to experience it, to feel the way we do.

But you just can’t put it into words.

And then it begins to fade.

You start to forget the tingling of excitement,
the thrill of the joy,
your daily life creeps in.

Eventually, you’re down from the mountain—
back on level ground, nothing exciting, nothing so emotionally-filled,
and you might even hit a valley or two.

This whole experience is nothing new.

Peter, James, and John went up a mountain, too (Mt 17:1).

They went with Jesus—

or better, Jesus went with them;

He brought them, He carried them, He did the hard work.
But nevertheless, they were there alone with Jesus.

Now, the Jesus that brought them up this mountain is the same Jesus who taught them from the Sermon on the Mount.

He's the same Jesus who they saw get Baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptizer;
 He's the same Jesus who's been preaching and teaching in synagogues and market places.
 They've gotten used to this Jesus.

So Jesus takes them up a mountain, by themselves,
 and out of the blue, **“Jesus was transfigured before them”** (17:2).
“His face shown like the sun,
His clothes became white as light;
and behold! Moses and Elijah were talking with Him” (17:2-3).

As any good Jew would know, Moses and Elijah were in *heaven*—
 that must mean that Peter, James, and John had now entered heaven.
 White light, the saints of old, high up on a mountain: *heaven*.

Now who wants to come down from there?
 Who wants the same-old, same-old of earth, when you've got heaven?

And so Peter, being the spokesman of the Apostles, comes up with a great idea for staying put:
“Lord, should I set up here three tents:
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah?” (17:4).

Tents are what the Israelites stayed in while traveling the wilderness with Moses.
 They're dwelling places—
 this isn't some weekend camping trip,
 but setting up in such a way to stick around for a good 40 years, or so!

Peter wanted to stay on top of the mountain.
 He had his *spiritual high*;
 his emotions were running all over,
 his excitement was through the roof,
 Peter was in *heaven*.

But like Peter, sometimes we get so excited that we say the wrong thing.
 That's why you can't rely on the mountain-top *experience*—
 you can't build your faith on that feeling you get from being *in heaven*—
 doing that, you can come away with the wrong answer—
sometimes your feelings lie.

The answer Peter had come up with is that this is permanent.
 It's just the way he had pictured it:
 Peter, James, and John (the chosen few, the 'in-group,' the favorites),
 along with Jesus and the two great figures of old: Moses and Elijah.

Peter wanted to make sure this day never ends.
 Now, Peter's answer was very conservative; it was kind and hospitable;
 but Peter interpreted this “mountain-top experience” entirely backwards.

He wanted to stay on the mountain and he wanted a tent for each of his favorite religious figures.
 That way, he could pop in the Jesus tent for an hour of friendly back and forth,
 then make his way to the Moses tent—
 brush up on the law and ask what that crazy Manna was like;
 and lastly visit Elijah—
 to hear what the Prophets are all about and how the ride was on the chariot of fire.

As excited, devoted, true, admirable, and faithful as Peter was,
he was wrong—
 that's not what the Lord wanted to give him.
 His emotions led him astray, his feelings deceived him;
 Peter missed the point of the mountain-top.

Rather than seeking to conserve or save this experience,
 this heavenly bliss and spiritual high,
 Peter should have asked,
 “Who *is* this Jesus?”
 “Who is this man that shines like the sun?”
 “Who is this that Moses and Elijah come to speak with?”

The answer to *these* question, is given by the Heavenly Father Himself:
 “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased—Listen to *Him*” (17:5).

We've heard this before, and so have Peter, James, and John.

We heard it about a month and half ago, back on January 16th when the Church celebrated the
 Baptism of Our Lord, Jesus—
 and Peter, James, and John were all there for it.

Remember back at the Jordan River,
 John the Baptizer was there.
 He made it clear that he wasn't worthy to do the Baptism,
 (much like your pastors here today)
 but the Lord put him there to do this very thing.
 And so, Jesus was baptized into the muddy river water of the Jordan,
 and **“coming up from the water, behold!**
The heavens were opened,
the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Him,
and a voice from *heaven* said,
‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’”
 (3:16-17).

These same words were just spoken today also.
 You all heard these words in our Gospel reading for today.

You might not've heard them, but they were also spoken at Grace and Derek's Baptism earlier.

You might not've seen it, but the Holy Spirit came down upon them and rested,
 and both Grace and Derek were told,
 "You are My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

That's what happens in Baptism.

And that's what the Lord wants to reveal, to *Epiphany*, to make known about this Jesus—
 He's the sort of Jesus that wants you to be with Him, too.
 He's the sort of Jesus that draws you into His own life,
 His own being the Son of God,
 His own glory and honor and *heaven*.

But He's also the sort of Jesus who does all this in a very unspectacular sort of way.
 He's the sort of Jesus who wants you to come down from the mountain-top.
 He's the sort of Jesus who does all this miraculous life-giving stuff
 with simple, plain, boring water.
 He's so earthy, so simple, so every-day.

He sends you off into this mundane world,
 the same-old, same-old,
 without any bright glory,
 no face that shines like the sun,
 but your normal face, with all its imperfections.

He takes you,
 someone much like Peter, James, and John,
 someone who wants the spectacular and glorious and heavenly,
 and sends you to do the same-old, same-old—
 but this time, as a Christian.

Now, He doesn't want you to *forget* what happened on this mountain-top.
 He doesn't want you to forget His radiant face or that thrill of seeing it and living.

And so He calls you to gather in His Church, week in and week out,
 in order to be reminded.
 Every week, He gives you His body and His blood, His word and His promise,
 and every week, He puts His name upon you, just like at Baptism,
 and then He sends you off seeing His face:
 "The Lord make His face to shine upon you" (Num 6:25).

The mountain of Transfiguration is certainly a mountain-top experience.
 But rather than staying, the Lord sends you, the baptized, back into this same-old world.
 That others too, might see His face.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit