

“Only Jesus”
Matthew 17:1 - 9
Transfiguration
January 31 - February 1, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Rev. Keith E. GeRue

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text for today is the Gospel lesson just read, which particular focus on the words, **“And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”**

It is a rare and amazing thing to have a glimpse of your own future. Perhaps, when you look into the faces of your children, you get a picture, an image of who you are, who you have been, and who you will be in the lives of your descendents. You look into their eyes, and a whole realm of history can flow right back at you. And there are certain days in each person’s life, when for just a moment, all of a family’s history comes together, and the whole stretch of life is viewed as a tapestry, where each family member’s life is a part of the whole tapestry.

Peter, James and John had the same sort of experience. Jesus asked them to go on a special trip to a mountain. And you know, when God goes to a mountain, something big is going to happen. There on the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. The word there is the same word which we get our English word, metamorphosis. And for just a few minutes, they beheld the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

To be sure, they did not deserve this honor. Peter, James and John had proven their unworthiness time and time again. Who could forget James and John’s mother coming to Jesus, and asking that they be placed at His right and left hands of power? And Peter, well, he is the brash one, always shooting off his mouth, always thinking he gets the whole story, when he doesn’t. Peter, the betrayer. No, they did not deserve the honor God gave them. We should not be surprised, then, when Peter wants to stay basking in the glory. We shouldn’t be too shocked when Peter asked to set up dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, so that they could stay on the mountain for a very long time. But it could not be so. Peter didn’t understand that Jesus great glory, His true glory, was not to be found on that mountain. For as Jesus stood on the mountain top, He could see another mountain in the distance, a mountain of shame and horrible suffering. Golgotha, the place of the skull.

We, like Peter, would like a Jesus who was only in it for the big show. Maybe that’s why the transfiguration intrigues so much. Jesus, the powerful God. Jesus, the mighty one, who gather’s His people together like a general gathers his troops. But we can’t forget the conversation. What was Jesus talking about with Moses and Elijah? Our text in Matthew doesn’t tell us, but Luke gives us a hint. Luke recounts that they were speaking of Jesus’ *exodus*, His departure. It’s almost like there is this conversation going on in heaven, and Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, come down to earth, and continue this heavenly conversation. And when was Jesus’ departure? The cross. His suffering and death. His departure from this earth.

Now doesn’t that tell us something? Doesn’t that give us a window into heaven? The Scriptures tell us that the angels of heaven rejoice when one sinner repents, because that one

sinner now sees themselves in Christ. The conversation of heaven, the writings of the Old Testament, the message of Jesus and the apostles, indeed the message of the whole Church is about Jesus work for your salvation. I had a professor once who would often say that all theology is Christology. It's all about Jesus. There is no getting beyond the message of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for your salvation. That's it! That is the eternal conversation of the heavenly hosts. That is the conversation we join when we sing with angels and archangels, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbaoth. Heaven and earth and full of your glory. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!* That's the message of all eternity, and we, by God's great mercy and love, hear and rejoice in that message week after week after week.

God's mercy in Christ Jesus is the most practical thing in your life. I think sometimes we can falsely give the impression that Jesus' work on the cross isn't enough. Ok, Jesus died for my sins, now how do I live better? How do I become a better parent, or spouse, or worker? Now are these bad questions? Not at all. But unless they are viewed through the lens of the cross, they mean nothing. Without Jesus, no amount of positive thinking or motivation or even fear of punishment amount to a hill of beans. If you don't have Jesus Christ, you have nothing, even if you own the whole world. But when you have Jesus, all of heaven is yours, even though the whole world rejects you. Now call me crazy, but that sounds a little practical to me.

In the transfiguration of our Lord, we are given a window into the mind of God. This is the last Sunday of Epiphany. During Epiphany we have been speaking at some length about who is Jesus, and what His nature is as the Son of God. There have been sermons on healings, and fasting, and the calling of the disciples, and the gifts of the magi. But now we are preparing to move into Lent. We know who Jesus is, He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. True God and true man. He loves you and gives you Himself according to His flesh. Now what does this Jesus do for you? That is the message of Lent. As the great Lenten hymn asks, What wondrous love is this, oh my soul, that caused the Lord of bliss, to lay aside His crown, for my soul. What wondrous love indeed. That is the love of the God who gives Himself to you. That is the love of a God who cannot bear to see you suffer the punishment you so richly deserve for your sins. You deserve it, yes. You deserve to die for your sins. But instead, He sends His Son into our flesh. He sends His Son into our flesh, to die.

What wondrous love. Each one of you have a story, a journey you have taken in your life that has led you to this place. I suppose from our human side, it seems like the journey has all been yours. But know this: God is the one who has been leading you on this journey into the flesh of His Son. The very hand of God has drawn you here, to hear His Word. With water and that same Word, the work of Satan is crushed into the dust. With the confession of that faith, eternal life is sealed by the Holy Spirit. That's a great work, and it's God's work in you and for you.

Today you begin a journey, the journey of faith. And starting Ash Wednesday, we begin that journey with Jesus again. We travel with Christ to the cross for our salvation. Today we bid farewell to the alleluias for a while, as we let our resurrection joy hide away during the season of Lent. We will set aside this joy for a time, but we can do so, knowing that it will come again. But this is really the joy of the Christian life. There will be days of suffering on this earth. But rejoice, for you know the end. Like Peter, James, and John, you have been given a little window into your life together, eternal life in Jesus.

And now perhaps the greatest work of all. Now God tenderly invites you to partake of His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. For at this altar, God comes to earth to feed you with Himself, to forgive you sins, and to draw you into this great and wonderful company of

the saints of God. For when you are in Jesus, you get it all. Forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. What more is there?

God the Father spoke from heaven and said, **This is my beloved Son, hear Him!** God calls you to His Church to hear the voice of His Son. And that voice is not one of judgment and fear. It is the voice of our elder brother, Jesus Christ, true God and true man. It is the voice of the God-man that loves you above all creation. It is the voice of God who draws you to Himself. For when you are in Jesus, you are a part of the great company of heaven, even though it cannot be seen today. But believe it, it is there.

Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. Only Jesus. All of these great things of God are there, but in the end, there is only Jesus. And He is enough. No, He is everything you need. Welcome to the family.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.