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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 2, 2014
Transfiguration Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 25:1-9; Matthew 17:1-9
Hymns: 359; 135; 719; 53:1-3; (38:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our glorious Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: The Transfiguration

I have already stated that Jesus' Transfiguration is the focus of our worship this morning. Every year we revisit these events on the holy mountain because this is one of the most significant events in the life of our Savior Jesus Christ. It was indeed significant for Jesus, as we referenced with our gospel lesson, in that He was encouraged by these two prophets who came and visited the Lord from their heavenly abode, speaking to Jesus of the ordeal of suffering that lay before Him, and showing Him the salvation that would be secured for men.

However it is also a very special event for us and our faith. That was the point that Peter was making in this, his second general epistle to Christians then and **now**.

THEME: Jesus' Transfiguration Affirms the Truth of Our Salvation.

We have provided for us in our text --

I. Eyewitness Testimony Affirming the Truth about Jesus.

Peter introduces his testimony with a rejection of the charge of Jesus' life story being nothing more than "**cunningly devised fables.**"

Greek mythology was popular and one of the cornerstones of the pagan religions in Greek and Roman society. They had many temples to many gods, and the children of the gods who, according to mythology, had been sent down to earth on missions from their fathers. Sometimes these Greek or Roman gods were presented as having children with mortal women, producing superhuman offspring, like Hercules. These were **cunningly devised fables** that people followed. While some knew it was all myth, others believed the stories were true, but either way it didn't matter, for the mythology presented their connection to the divine.

Did this happen by chance No, not by chance. This was the devil's way of throwing up a smokescreen to hide the truth about Jesus, to make it acceptable to think of Jesus in the same way. And so it was proposed then, **and continues to be proposed today**, that much of what we read about Jesus in the gospels are **cunningly devised**

fables. Of course this would be effective in a world that was so used to hearing fantastic stories about the gods and their children. It was expected that they should hear stories, incredible stories about Jesus, but stories that rational, thinking adults would not believe, at least not literally.

Peter writes here to debunk this view of Christ. And so Peter cites the transfiguration of our Lord. As an eyewitness of the majestic glory of Jesus, Peter affirms that Jesus is all that is taught concerning Him. They were “**eyewitnesses of His majesty!**” They were there, and Peter, James, and John saw the glory of the Lord revealed in Jesus’ transfiguration. He was changed before them so that “**His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as light**” (Matthew 17:2). Eyewitness testimony may not always be regarded as reliable in some details, but this event was different, and their testimony is sure, and assured by the Holy Spirit. This event was extraordinary. They were with Him and the change was real, and this change revealed the glory of the Son of God! They saw Moses and Elijah visiting with Jesus. They experienced the bright cloud coming over them where they were, and they felt the glory, and heard the voice of God! This is an accurate recounting of an extraordinary, indeed, supernatural event.

Eyewitness testimony certifies the truth of Jesus, and who He was and is, and the power He possessed and the glory He revealed in His miracles and in His teaching. These aren’t made up stories. Hear and **know the truth** of the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The evidence continues to grow concerning the truth about Jesus with --

II. The Endorsement of God the Father.

We are flooded with so many endorsements that we are pretty much jaded by them. Celebrity endorsements that are supposed to mean so much begin to mean very little. Some are more believable than others, but are Henry Winkler or Fred Thompson going to convince you to go out and get a reverse mortgage? On the other hand, Dave Ramsey, a well know radio personality speaking about personal finances, endorses certain companies for your financial business only after he carefully scrutinizes them, and they must

meet certain criteria he has established before he will endorse them.

What we have here is so far superior to any of that that it is not worthy to be compared, much less equated. We have God the Father speaking from the bright cloud so that the Apostles Peter, James, and John might hear, and later more fully understand the significance of what the Father had to say. He was owning this Jesus as His beloved Son. The days were coming, and coming very soon when the disciples would be offended because of Jesus, and they would run away. Peter would deny even knowing Jesus. They would be offended because He was taken by His enemies. His enemies would condemn Jesus to death because He claimed to be the Son of God. Down through the centuries since that time others have claimed to be the Son of God, but none of the others had the full and unreserved endorsement of God the Father. Jesus is the real thing, the only begotten Son of God!

The voice coming from the bright cloud owned Jesus as His Son, and declared that in Him He was well pleased. God the Father saw all that Jesus had done and taught and it was all, ALL according to the Father's will and plan for our salvation. Going forward to the cross Jesus would fulfill the redemptive mission that had been given Him from the Father. He would shed His holy precious blood for the sins of the world. He would endure the curse of God on the cross because of our sins. He would satisfy divine justice that we might have pardon and peace in His name. **God the Father was well pleased with Jesus.**

This endorsement grants us the blessed assurance that our salvation is secure, that our sins are forgiven, and that we do indeed have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This transfiguration endorsement is indeed a blessed assurance concerning Jesus, and it encourages us that we ought always to put our faith in Him, yes even, or especially, in the face of tribulation or persecution.

In our text Peter has another lesson to draw from the Transfiguration. He declares Jesus' transfiguration to be --

III. A Demonstration of the Truth of the Word.

How should the Bible be classified in literature? At the library one would look for the Bible in the philosophy section, and then the theology or religion subcategory. There will be all sorts of books gathered on the shelves around the Bible, including the “holy books” of other religions of the world, and many writings by other “great thinkers” of years gone by, and of our own time. There will be many spiritual self-help books promoting yoga and transcendental meditation, and the power of positive thinking. So much of this is nothing more than the vain ideas and imagining of men, with little or no foundation in truth. Promising life, they much more often lead to death, eternal death.

Peter brings us to see the surety of truth and life and faith that is found in the Holy Scriptures being affirmed by the transfiguration incident. We have the words of the prophets made more sure. We have the truth of Jesus as Lord and Teacher of God’s truth established. Jesus sent forth His apostles with His message of grace and truth. **All** the Holy Scriptures are authenticated by what Peter heard and saw that day.

Is there life after death? Is there glory awaiting us through faith in Christ Jesus? Peter saw the evidence of that Biblical teaching in the appearance of Moses and Elijah. They appeared in glory. This was not an apparition, a vision or a dream, or the product of an overactive imagination. Moses and Elijah were there with the Lord! They were there in glory, and they were there visiting with Jesus about His impending death on the cross. Their presence was surely an encouragement to Jesus that His sufferings would be effective, for in Moses and Elijah there stood before Him two saved souls who were already enjoying the full blessing of salvation in heaven. But for Peter, James, and John, as well as for you and me, their presence is a demonstration that what we have been told in all of Holy Scripture is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! Moses who wrote the first books of the Bible, and Elijah who was God’s faithful prophet to Israel did not present their own ideas and imaginings to us also through the Bible. They represented God in their preaching and their writing. God gave them the message. The Spirit directed all of Moses’ writings, and all Elijah’s preaching, and their presence on the Holy Mountain verified that they were men of God.

Peter's conclusion is that all of Holy Scripture shines with the light of God's truth and dispels the darkness of sin and death. We have a true and certain hope of eternal life in Jesus our Lord. Above all, of this we can be certain that the Bible is God's Word, not man's. The Words of all Holy Scripture which were written down by about 40 different men, had as their true author the Holy Spirit who breathed into them the words of life and salvation. The Holy Scriptures which flows from beginning to end with one consistent message is true from Genesis to Revelation.

CONCLUSION: The glory of the Transfiguration is not only seen in the personal glory of Jesus who was and is both true God and true man. It is also the glory of His mission that He fulfilled in His person and life, and in His sufferings and death. As we this week proceed into the season of Lent, let us do so with a refreshed appreciation of the glory that was and is the Lord's, as we consider how He humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

TLH 359:1,3

“Christ whose glory fills the skies, Thou the true, the only Light
Sun of Righteousness arise, Triumph o'er the shades of night.
Dayspring from on high be near; Daystar in my heart appear.

“Visit then this soul of mine, Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiance Divine, Scatter all my unbelief.
More and more Thyself display, Shining to the perfect day.”

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.