

‘Tis Good Lord To Be Here
Matthew 17:1-9

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

In the chapter before our text, Jesus had asked the disciples who the people were saying that the Son of Man was. The people thought He was a prophet, John the Baptist resurrected, or even Elijah returned.

But then Jesus tightened the focus of the question and asked His disciples, “But who do *you* say that I am?” It was in response to this question that Peter had confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt. 16:16)

Scripture records: From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mt. 16:21-23)

It was only six days later that Jesus led Peter, with James and John, up to a high mountain. There, He was transfigured before the three - the glory of God was revealed in Him - his face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light. And against all possibly conceived thought, Moses and Elijah also appeared to speak with Jesus.

Peter had to have the fore mentioned encounter still ruminating in his head. Jesus was pretty adamant that He was going to suffer and die, He believed it was going to happen. Peter probably believed that Jesus was right, and although he'd been rebuked, he was still hoping it would not happen. So, he says to Jesus, right there on that mountain, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

I can almost hear Peter's comments as he might have spoken them, “Lord, we want to stay here. Your glory is now evident to us. Your divine radiance is here. Moses and Elijah are now here, the greatest prophets from of old.” And secretly he was probably hoping, “and if we stay here, you won't have to suffer and die.”

I have kind of an idea of what he was thinking. A couple years back, Nathan and I were fishing Little Sturgeon Bay, and the fish were biting like crazy. We were catching them left and right - we didn't want to come down from the mountain.

I am looking forward to the coming Higher Things retreat at Trinity Lutheran Church in Sheboygan. These have been great events. I get to teach a session and the youth come out in droves, they love what I have to present. We get to make new friends, we enjoy the company, we grow in our Christian faith. And we worship. The past ones have been wonderful. I am looking forward to it, and I know I will not want to come down from the mountain.

Every catechetical retreat brings up a few of the same questions each year, “Pastor, can we make

it a few days longer next year?" As if 3-4 hours a sleep for three nights isn't enough to wear an old man out, they'd like to add a couple more days? Or the other question I have been asked, "Yeah Pastor Jerabek, I know that this is my third and final year that I'm eligible to come to the retreat, but can I come back next year anyway?"

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LWML Conventions, Youth Gatherings, Pastor's Retreats and Conferences, often raise similar feelings as we get caught up in the good things going on of worship, study of God's Word, and discussions with friends. We don't want it to end. There are even times that Bible Study has gone way over the hour and we wonder where the time has gone.

But, as always, those times must come to an end. We must come down off the mountain. The emotional high cannot last forever. But, it was good to be there.

So, upon the mountain in our text, what was it that Elijah and Moses were speaking with Jesus about? Luke explains that they spoke of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:31) They were discussing the very things that Jesus had taken on human flesh to accomplish. They spoke about the very things that Jesus tried to get Peter to understand had to take place. For the glory of heaven which they were enjoying at that moment to continue, Jesus had to accomplish His work in Jerusalem; in the Jewish courtroom, before Pilate, and upon the cross.

There they were on the mountain, and the three disciples were given a glimpse of heavenly glory. They were only too aware that what they were seeing was a taste of the what the glory of heaven would be like. They didn't want that to end. There was Jesus in His glory, Peter didn't want that to end. Peter did not like, nor did he understand God's concept of the suffering servant. He would have preferred to remain right there enjoying his wildest dreams fulfilled.

Think about it, his two best friends, James and John were there. Jesus was now showing forth His Divine glory, that He was God. And, to top it all off, here were Moses and Elijah - the greatest men of the Old Testament. Incredible! What more was necessary?

Then a bright cloud enveloped them, and in that cloud, God the Father spoke, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. Where a moment before they were ecstatic with unfathomable joy, now they were terrified. This is all beyond them. Truly this is the Son of God. We are nothing but poor, miserable sinners. We are not worthy to be here.

Jesus came and touched them saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And they were alone with Jesus - and in Jesus, the fear of God is removed. Yes, the glory had passed. It was time to come down from the mountain. For that moment which Peter loved so much to last, Jesus had to come down from the mountain. For Peter, James and John to enjoy that glory for eternity, Jesus needed to do exactly what He had proclaimed. He must go to Jerusalem and He must suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and He must be killed, and on the third day He must be raised.

Dearly beloved of God, that glory which Peter, James, and John wanted to continue is your future heritage. It is what we will enjoy for all eternity. But we don't live on the mountain. That glory is still before us.

You and I live in a world that is vile and evil. At every turn, it tempts us to find some kind of glory here. We would like nothing better than for there to be an end to all military conflict, and peace on earth. Wouldn't it be great if there was a pill developed which would cure any kind of cancer instantaneously? How wonderful it would be if the desires of our hearts could be realized in this life? And secretly, that is exactly what we wish for?

Then the voice of God speaks, and we are terrified. God's word opens our eyes and we see that we will endure suffering and tribulations in this life. They come upon us, for sinfulness is running rampant, not only in the world, but in our own flesh - for we want the desires flesh to continue - we want our sinful desires to come about, so that our sinful flesh is kept happy.

Jesus came down from the mountain to purchase our forgiveness. Christ came down from the mountain, so that you and I might be raised up to the eternal heavenly mountaintop at the last day, freed from our bondage to this flesh and life, and given that which is even more glorious.

We look at where we are today and think, "Boy, wouldn't it have been great to be on that mountaintop with Jesus? To see Him transfigured and to behold His glory?"

We look for that glory in so many wrong places, all we need to do is open our eyes by faith.

(Point to the altar) Behold the mountaintop and the glory of the Lord. You are there, and Christ's glory is revealed. Christ is present, He sets His table before us, even as He is present at the table He has prepared and set in heaven for all the saints who have gone before us. We have raised our voices in song, joining with all the heavenly host in glory. In gathering at His table, we are gathered around Christ who gives to us His flesh and blood. We eat, we drink, we are given eternal life and salvation. The glory witnessed by the disciples is given to us as a future hope and security through the divine meal of which we partake.

We can rejoice with all boldness, for what Peter beheld is ours for eternity. It is the gift we receive today in Word and Sacrament from Christ Himself. Let us rejoice in God's goodness in Christ Jesus. Let us proclaim the truth of our faith. And by God's grace, until our last day, this is the mountaintop that refreshes us, that we might continue to fight the good fight of faith. Yes, 'Tis good Lord, to be here. Amen.