



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

We all need encouragement from time to time. We need it when we are young. We need it when we are old and all the years in between. We need encouragement when we are doing well in life and when we are struggling.

I don't know how many of you watched the Olympics that concluded a week or so ago, but there was one young lady who needed encouragement. 15-year-old Kamila Valieva, skating for the ROC had a positive drug test before Christmas and it did not come to light until after she helped her team win the gold medal in the team skating competition. She was the up-and-coming super star in the skating world. The first woman to do a quad in competition at the Olympics. Well, I do think that the medals are still in contention, team USA was 2<sup>nd</sup> place. There is an ongoing investigation into her doping with accusations that she should not have been allowed to skate at all. During her singles free skate, she fell several times, which she had not done in the past. Finishing 4<sup>th</sup>, she came off the ice and the first thing her coach did was to holler at her. My heart sank as I watched this young girl, who was devastated, get rejected by her coach. Encouragement was what this young lady needed, not some nasty banter by her trainer.

Sometimes we need encouragement in the little moments in life and sometimes in those big moments, when things don't go our way. Encouragement can go a long way when life is at a crossroad or when we must

make a big decision maybe about our career, buying a house, getting married or medical treatments. In those moments encouragement means a lot.

So, by now you might be asking what all this encouragement talk has to do with our Gospel story about Jesus and His transfiguration. Well, what an encouragement Jesus received from His Father when he said, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!" What could be more encouraging than to hear that you are chosen, and that people should listen to you.

Think with me for a minute. Jesus was truly human just like you and me. He experienced the same joys in life that we know and most likely he shared some fears with us as well. Maybe, just maybe, God knew that Jesus needed some encouragement just as much as we do. At this point in Jesus' life, he is making the shift to setting his sights on Jerusalem where he would suffer at the hands of his enemies and be crucified on a cross. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him in the very near future. He knew that he would meet death very soon. And he was very innocent but would die cruelly. Jesus would be beaten, whipped, and mocked and then be nailed to a cross where everyone would be able to see his naked body struggling for a last breath. That thought of what He had to do would make any human flinch. In this Lukean text, we hear that Jesus spent some time talking to Elijah and Moses. This is the only transfiguration account where we are told that Jesus talked to these two men. Could it be that they were talking about God's plan to save humanity and how Jesus would succumb to death on a cross? I would like to suggest that Jesus, in all his humanity, probably needed some encouragement to face this challenge and set his sights on Jerusalem.

God came to Jesus at that moment. And I too would have loved to experience this like Peter, James and John did. To see Jesus in all his glory. No wonder Peter wanted to build tents to try to contain the moment. And I believe it true, that at that point, the famous trio did not realize what was to happen to Jesus. They refused to hear Jesus when he gave them snippets of what was in his future. God knew that this was a rough and tough calling for Jesus to die on a cross and rise again to save humanity.

I also think that this transfiguration moment was an event that God orchestrated to encourage the disciples. Seeing Jesus glow with dazzling brightness and seeing Elijah and Moses that represented the Law and the Prophets was important to the disciples understanding of who Jesus really was. Jesus was truly God's Son, chosen for a special task. As the disciples

would come to know, this was all part of God's amazing plan to save humanity. And the disciples needed all the encouragement they could get!

At my home congregation, St Olaf in Rubicon, WI, we had a yearlong discipleship training program that the congregation went through. Several of us worked tirelessly to put it together and make it memorable to those who did participate. There were 6 marks of discipleship that we identified. First was to pray. Second, was to read Scripture. Third was to worship regularly. Forth, was to give. Fifth, was to serve. The last mark of discipleship, and I think the one that was most misunderstood was to encourage others on their faith journey. The more that I have thought about that in the last few years, the more I feel it is one of the most important things we can do for each other. To encourage each other's walk with Christ.

Being an obedient and loyal servant or disciples of Christ does not come easy. It does not come naturally. We all need encouragement in our faith journey and God knows that too. In fact, that is exactly why God sent the Holy Spirit to us as a most valuable gift. The Spirit's encouragement comes as He walks alongside us to give our faith a boost. And so just as the Holy Spirit does this for us so we too should encourage one another.

That is why I have always believed that our coffee hour here at CTS is so important. Surely not that we need the calories of the sweet treats, but it is the time when we cannot only see how God is working in each other's lives, but we can encourage each other in our daily journey of faith. There are many other events in our lives where discouragement, unkind criticism and uncaring attitudes abound. It is wonderful to come to coffee hour and be accepted, loved, and encouraged.

Think for a few minutes about who has encouraged you most in your faith journey. Maybe it was a parent, a grandparent, a pastor, or a fellow quilter. For me it was my grandmother. She was one who encouraged me to believe that God was love, perfect love and that I was a reflection of that love. Another encourager for me was the Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. I clearly remember sitting in his office and hearing the encouraging words that I should go to seminary and be a pastor. Sometimes encouragement does not have to be a big as that but can make an impact just the same. "Keep up the good work", is said by your new boss. Or a simple "thank you" for a job well

done. Maybe encouragement can come in the form of a smile on a stressful day.

True, encouraging others does not always come easy. Sometimes we have to work at it. Yet, we are all called to love one another. So just as our heavenly Father encouraged Jesus that day on the mountain top, he encourages us today through the Holy Spirit. So, I hope we can all continue to encourage others in their walk with the Lord. AMEN