

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen**

**The Transfiguration of Our Lord (2021)**

**Faith Comes by Listening to Him**

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***“He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5, ESV)***

In the account of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus there are two verses that jump out at me in St. Matthew’s and St. Mark’s gospels, but especially in St. Matthew’s account. The first verse follows God speaking from the cloud and the apostles, hearing His voice, fall on the ground and cower in fear. But Jesus comes to them and tells them not to cower on the ground but to stand and have no fear, then St. Matthew says, ***“And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.” (Matthew 17:8, ESV)***

How remarkable is this verse? To see only Jesus. To know that while you are in His presence there is no need to fear, no need to cower either from the fear of God’s wrath or the wrath of man. For you are in the presence of Him who gives eternal life. You are in the presence of the Son of the Living God whose desire is to have you with Him for all eternity and whose efforts, His life, death, and resurrection brought that to fruition. As you stand before Him, you are in the presence of Him of whom St. Paul said, ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1, ESV)*** How wonderful it is to awaken in the morning and see Christ before you, knowing He will be with you throughout the day, comforting you and guiding you by the One He has placed into your heart through the blessed waters of Baptism, the Holy Spirit. So, yes, we should all pray that when we rise, we see ***“no one but Jesus only.”***

The second verse in this account of the Transfiguration that edifies me is the verse which, for me, is the sedes doctrinae, that is the center of and the point of this Gospel Reading: while St. Peter, ***“was still speaking . . . behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5, ESV)***

Here St. Matthew paints an accurate portrayal of the overshadowing presence of God. Covering the entire scene with a bright cloud, God speaks, ***“This is my beloved Son.”*** He tells the apostles, the One who stands before you, transfigured, His divine radiance on full display, He is my beloved Son, He is the Son of the Living God. He is the key, not Moses, not Elijah. My Son, He is the One who fulfills Israel’s hopes and the hope of the Gentiles. He is the One who fulfills my promise in the Garden of Eden, the seed of the woman who will crush the head of Satan. He will bring salvation to all men. Therefore, ***“listen to him.”*** But why listen to Jesus? The answer to that question lies in the truth of who we are, sinners!

This answer may be known by a few, but most of the world does not know why they should listen to Jesus. However, Scripture, pulling no punches, tells us clearly that all mankind is sinful. Now, one might say, so what, so occasionally, I disobey God. But if sin were only disobedience, that is, a deviation from the norm of God’s will, the damage might be repaired by falling in line with God’s will and willingly obeying Him. However, sin, in the strict sense, is “enmity against God,” that is, an active opposition to the will of God who is active against sin. So, God replies to

sin with judgment, judgment that can and does terminate in our death. Moreover, sin, not only clings to our individual acts but to the sum of our lives. Thereby, we become hopelessly subject to God's judgment, even if at some moment in our lives we try to put an end to our opposition to God. But pious living and good works will not save you. You cannot balance sin and judgement against each other. This is the theology of "free will," man being responsible for his salvation. Truth is that man has the ability to do what he *wants* to do; but he does not have the ability, on his own, to do what he *should* to please God. Since man cannot save himself from his sin, he must have One who will save him and that One is Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Therefore, when God says, "***listen to him,***" listen to His Son, this is not a request, it is an imperative, a command from God. Listen to what His Son has to say, that life and salvation are found only in Him. Listen to the Gospel message of life and salvation in His name and for His sake. At His Transfiguration, God declares this Jesus is not just the prophet spoken of by Moses, when he said, "***The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—***" (*Deuteronomy 18:15, ESV*) but here stands the divine One who is prophet, priest, and king, My beloved Son.

Listen to Him when He says, "***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***" (*Matthew 11:28, ESV*) Listen to Him when He says, "***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***" (*John 6:35, ESV*)

Jesus calls, come to Me, come to Me for salvation and eternal life. But the voice of the world says, "No, no, no, don't go to Him, come to me. I will satisfy your lust, your flesh, your base desires. I will give you power, make you rich, give you fame. If you come to me, you will want for nothing. So, follow me, I am where the true power lies." This voice is the voice of the antichrist, Satan. His desire is to corrupt, pollute, and destroy all that God calls good and all that Jesus has sanctified with His life, death, and resurrection. His desire is to seduce you into believing his lies, to lead you away from the salvation found in God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. His desire is to convince you, you *should* do what you *want*, and thereby, he imprisons your soul in hell for all eternity. But God says we are not to listen to the voice of Satan or to the voices of the corrupted world, instead, we are to listen only to the voice of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so we can be forgiven when we do not do as we *should* in God's eye. Moreover, listening to Jesus is not difficult for His voice is spoken from many venues.

Thus, His voice is heard in the liturgy of the church as it holds you in the hand of God throughout Divine Service, enfolding you in God's Word from the Invocation to the Benediction. It is heard in absolution, in the Kyrie and the Gloria in Excelsis, in the Sanctus and in the Agnus Dei, in the Christian Creeds, and in our Lord's Word of consecration. It is heard in hymnody which proclaims Christ as the Son of God and our Savior. It is heard, seen, and received in the holy Sacraments where God cleanses you of sin in the blessed water of Baptism and where you see Jesus face-to-face as you come to the Altar rail and commune with Him, with His true body given in death and His true blood shed for you upon the Altar of the Cross. It is heard in the Scriptures where God reveals His Son to the world, it is heard in your heart as the Holy Spirit sanctifies you, it is heard as you bear your cross in this veil of tears with your eyes fixed on Jesus only, and it is heard in the voice of the pastor who proclaims the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacrament ministry.

Yes, it is heard in the voice of the pastor more than in any other place, for he has been called and set apart by God to be the voice of Jesus in the public square. To His appointed under-shepherds, Jesus said, "***The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.***" (*Luke 10:16, ESV*)

Men who are called by God are called by the church, examined by the church's theological faculty who attest to their doctrinal and theological fitness, the men who meet these criteria are then ordained, prayed over, laid hands on, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit to perform the duties to which the office calls. The sainted Martin Luther once preached that the Holy Spirit is, *"always with us for our office when we preach the Gospel, baptize, absolve, and give the Sacraments according to the Holy Spirit's institution and ordinance."* Therefore Luther viewed ordination not as a mere human activity, but a divine one. He taught that when the ordaining minister and his assistants perform the ordination rite before the church, the church is acting as God's instrument. Thus, "God makes and ordains ministers (pastors)". Therefore, in Luther's view and in the view of the church, the office of pastor is a divine office, one set aside by Christ for the specific function of Word and Sacrament ministry. One set aside to become an extension of the voice of Jesus to whom people are to listen. This is God's command from within the bright cloud. So when the pastor speaks, open your ears, and listen to Jesus to receive the gift that assuages God's wrath when you fail to do what you *should* to please Him. Receive the gift of faith to believe in the atoning sacrifice of God's only begotten Son for the forgiveness of sins for all who repent. Thus, Christ speaks through the voice of St. Paul, saying, ***"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*** (*Romans 10:17, ESV*)

Through their voices, pastors lead you to the Theology of the Cross and away from the Theology of Glory. They lead you to the uncorrupted Christ and away from corrupted man. They lead you to the Gospel for salvation and away from the Law for salvation. Pastors lead you to truth of the Gospel, that which focuses on God as God hidden and God revealed, reminding believers of God's will for humanity which is opposed to the will and whim of man who is prone to speculate on his efforts of salvation. In proclaiming the Word of Christ, pastors lead you to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, embracing God's atoning work in the death and resurrection of His beloved Son in whom He is pleased. Pastors lead you to walk away from your worldly ways and center your life on the justifying work of Christ. By listening to the voice of the pastor you hear *Christ and are given the gift of faith.*

Now, having listened to Christ and been brought to faith by His Word, God fortifies you against the voice of the world as it cries out to you, enticing you to sin. As a child of God you can reject the worldly call because you have the Holy Spirit residing in you. He will lead you and help you to reject the call of the world by reminding you who you are, one who has heard the voice of Jesus, that voice which reassures you, comforts and consoles you as you hear Him say, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** (*Matthew 11:28, ESV*) "Come to me, I have given My life that your sins may be forgiven. Trust in this gift I gave, have no fear, rise and come to My altar where through the ears of my under-shepherd I will hear your confession and absolve you. Yes, for My sake, My heavenly Father will forgive you, cleansing you of your sin and reassuring you of your salvation. All this He will do for my sake while opening the door to His heavenly home that you may come and dwell with Me for all eternity."

In the hymn of Invocation this morning we heard the words the famous hymnist, Horatio Bonar say:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
"Come unto Me and rest;  
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down  
Thy head upon My breast."

And as we heard the sweet, consoling, and forgiving voice of our Lord in this hymn, we can then, with Horatio say:

I came to Jesus as I was,  
So weary, worn, and sad;  
I found in Him a resting place,  
And He has made me glad. (LSB 699:1)

Oh, to listen to our Lord Jesus, to see Him face-to-face, is this not our desire? Is this not the desire of all who have heard Him and come to believe in His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins? More than once, Jesus has said, ***“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*** (*Matthew 11:15, ESV*)

So, we pray, help us Lord Jesus to hear You, to hear Your saving word of the Gospel, to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as He calls us to faith. For *Faith only Comes by Listening to Jesus*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen