

#109
March 8, 2020
Journey to the Cross
Matthew 17:1-9

17 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "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." ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Today is the second Sunday of Lent which is a season of journeying to the cross. Last week we focused on the first of several spiritual disciplines. How did it go? Do you remember what it was? It is OK, if you do not remember or have not started yet. As long as we breathe we have time to start now. The discipline was to practice reading Scripture every day. Yes, you have time for 10 minutes each day.

Thank you for the crosses on the altar. I invite everyone to bring a cross from home. May it be a sign during Lent that you are joining the journey to Good Friday.

This Sunday I ask you to give thought to the spiritual discipline of generosity. I challenge you to reflect on your love to and for God. There is a strong correlation between generosity and spiritual maturity. Giving is not separate from our faith. Jesus talked a lot about money and possessions. 11 out of 39 parables are about money. In fact, there are more than 2,300 verses on money, wealth and possessions.

My family and I are the recipients of lavish generosity from this church. We shall be forever grateful. There are many daily ways to practice generosity such as the amount you tip the waitress in the restaurant, taxi driver or hotel maid. You can always choose to do a random act of kindness for an acquaintance.

Last Sunday we looked at Christ's temptations in the wilderness. Jesus, who was tried in every way that we are, overcame them all. Because He is with us, we can, too. Our best approach is to come closer to God and live in the Word of God. We can be victorious. Yes, it is difficult. By the presence and power to the Holy Spirit you can withstand the trials and temptations that come your way. Do not give up on trying to live a holy life.

One evening, during family devotions, we read the familiar Bible story about Zacchaeus. "When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name! "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick! Come down! For I am going to be a guest in your home today!"

Emma interrupted our reading: "What if Zacchaeus had a messy home. He would not have time to clean his house!" We all laughed. Emma's eyes became big. She said, "I figured it out. I finally know why you, Mommy, are always cleaning the house. It is because you never know when Jesus will come".

In what ways are you keeping your life clean for when Jesus comes.

Today's text is about the Transfiguration of Jesus. Peter, James, John are with Jesus. "And Jesus was transformed before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light".

Aside from the resurrection and the ascension this event is the only miracle recorded which happens to Jesus himself.

Why was Jesus transfigured? Why only three disciples? Was it something Jesus needed for strength and determination to go on to Jerusalem? What does this have to do with my own faith journey?

Six days earlier Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Then he asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

They had seen Jesus walk on water, feed thousands, turn water into wine, heal every disease, cast out demons and even raise people from the dead. His preaching and teaching was like nothing anyone ever heard before. Jesus knew that he would have to suffer and die. It was beyond anyone's imagination that Jesus would not use his powers to save himself from the shameful death on a cross. I believe that God wanted them, for a moment, to see a glimpse who Jesus truly is. We cannot possibly grasp the depth of what it truly meant for Jesus to voluntarily choose to decrease himself so much. He left all the power, glory and splendor of heaven to become so vulnerable.

So, why the transfiguration?

The starting point is the fact that God is love. This was an act of love.

This was an opportunity to demonstrate God's love for us by showing these three what Jesus sacrificed to become human. For a few seconds they witnessed the glory of God shining through. After the death and resurrection of Jesus they would begin to understand the sacrifice Jesus was making simply because he loves us.

People who are deeply in love will do many unexplainable deeds. When Andrew and I got married, Andrew had a big beautiful Ford truck. His wife was convinced that it is not an economical vehicle for our family budget. I am convinced that Andrew would never have even considered selling that truck if he had not been in love. You have to know Andrew and the meaning of the truck to him. I think many of you understand it very well. My heart aches for what Andrew sacrificed. We traded it in for a tiny blue PT Cruiser.

This week's challenge is the spiritual discipline of generosity. We practice this to show our love in response to God's immense love. In Revelation 2 the church in Ephesus is praised for the many right things they are doing and even suffering for the sake of Christ. Then we read these troubling words, "Yet I hold this against you: You don't have as much love as you used to. Consider how far you have fallen. Turn around and do the things you did at first."

Does this apply to you or me? Do we still have the love we used to have? How have you shown your love for Jesus? In what ways have we been radical in our generosity?

The inside light became so strong that it was visible in his face and even his clothes became bright. Peter, James and John discovered Jesus' body was only a cover over the light within.

Jesus was, is, and always be that light, but not all can see. There are so many things that we cannot see with our physical eyes. It is not that they do not exist; we just cannot see them. Jesus does not become somebody else. No, he is the same person but here he lets others see His true glory.

On Mount Sinai, Moses made a request to God. "Please show me your glorious presence."

¹⁹ The Lord said, "I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I'll proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord.' I will be kind to whomever I wish to be kind, and I will have compassion to whomever I wish to be compassionate. ²⁰ But," the Lord said, "you can't see my face because no one can see me and live." ²¹ The Lord said, "Here is a place near me where you will stand beside the rock. ²² As my glorious presence passes by, I will set you in a gap in the rock, and I'll cover you with my hand until I've passed by. ²³ Then I'll take away my hand, and you will see my back, but my face won't be visible."

"As Moses came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God".

Have you seen somebody's face to light up? It is not something you can do to yourself out of your own strength, wish, or desire. Even make-up will not help. It comes

when you hang out with the light. You get it when you are in fellowship with the light of the world.

As our kids soak up who we truly are, we soak up our Father's light. Return to your first love of God. Love Him like crazy. Run to be with Him. Smile just knowing He is with you. See how radiant is His light and love for you. God is madly in love with you. Have you not noticed?

The first reason is love. The second answer to the question why is that He wanted his disciples, including you and me, to also have that light.

Thirdly, Jesus wanted His followers to have a glimpse into eternity: "And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him." Moses was dead long ago. Elijah never died but went to heaven in a chariot of fire many centuries ago.

Moses went up Mount Sinai alone to pray. Elijah alone up Mount Horeb to pray. He found God, not in the wind or the earthquake, but in the still small voice. Now Jesus is on this unnamed mountain to pray.

There was only one thing that mattered to Jesus and that was to do God's will. He had been talking for weeks about going to Jerusalem to die. Now that he was beginning his journey to the cross he wanted to be absolutely certain he was on the right track. He had to talk things over with God.

Peter, James and John see these ancient heroes in person. They are alive and talking to Jesus. For me, it is a great assurance that heaven is real. Regardless of the constraints of time all the saints are alive and are able to be in the presence of Jesus.

A fourth reason is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets. They see Moses who represents the law of God and they see Elijah who represents all the prophets. What do you think Moses and Elijah were saying to Jesus? In the gospel of Luke, we find that they were talking about Jesus' death – His departure from this world. What do you think they are saying to Jesus? "Yes, Jesus, you are doing the right thing."

Jesus loved these disciples so much that he showed His glory, gave them a glimpse of eternity and proved that He was the fulfillment of God's plan for all humanity. He also wanted them to know that he was laying down his life for our sake. Nobody was taking His life from Him.

Peter cannot just stand there and not say or do something about it. I think Peter is overwhelmed with what he experiences. Peter suggests that they built three tents – one for Moses and one for Elijah and one for Jesus. Was he trying to show hospitality? Did he want to make the mountain top experience last longer? Did he want the place to be a shrine?

“He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.” It was a cloud that let the people of Israel through the wilderness. A cloud hovered over Mount Sinai. The cloud of the Shekinah Glory filled Solomon’s temple.

“and a voice from the cloud said, “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. Peter James and John were able to handle Jesus shining like the sun. They even handle seeing Moses and Elijah to be alive. But when they heard, just heard, the voice of God they fell to the ground in absolute terror.

Peter, listen to Jesus. You do not need to always say or do something. Just listen. Jesus is my beloved Son. What you can do the best now and later is to LISTEN.

Moses and Elijah served their purpose which was to point to Jesus. It is not about honoring them with tents or whatever. It is all about the Son of God. Three tents would be they are all equally honored. God was making it clear that not even Moses and Elijah deserve the love and respect that Jesus deserves.

30 years later Peter was still talking about it. In his second letter, he wrote, *“For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”*

Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” Jesus also says to you and me, “Rise, have no fear.” Jesus comes to you and me in love.

It is hard to follow somebody if you have no love for him or her. It is even harder to walk to the cross if you have no love. It is hard to give, it is hard to accept, and it is hard to die if you have no love. These three disciples were able to see God’s glory and love as Jesus opened the curtain. Today you and I are invited to experience God’s love and witness God’s glory too. As we come to the table, all of us are able to receive God’s love. All that is required is faith to believe in God’s love and grace. Jesus said, every time you break the bread and share the cup, I am with you.

The Almighty God, in all His majesty, has come to us in love and wants to make His presence known here at New Life and in your life every day. Do you know God’s love for you? He wants you to participate in the light and love of His holiness. As we eat this bread and drink this juice invite that light to be your light. We have received His love. How will you respond to THAT LOVE?