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The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Series A)

March 2, 2014

Text: Matthew 17:1–9

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

As you know, I am not given to theatrics in the pulpit. No gimmicks or tricks. But there was a part of me that wanted to stand here and say, “Jesus is God’s beloved Son, with whom the Father is well pleased; listen to Him.” And then sit down while we sang the offertory. It would have been a 5 second sermon!! I can only imagine your shock and surprise at such a thing.

5 seconds was all God the Father needed to set Peter straight on the Mount of Transfiguration. Three brief but powerful phrases formed the Father’s Transfiguration sermon (vs. 5): 1) This is my beloved Son, 2) with whom I am well pleased, and 3) listen to Him. I’m not God the Father so I need a bit longer to fulfill my pastoral responsibilities. But I will use the Father’s preaching to guide my own this morning.

According to vs. 1, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. We aren’t sure exactly which mountain but tradition suggests Mount Tabor in southern Galilee. Vs. 1 also mentions this taking place “after six days.” That’s not an insignificant time reference for six days earlier Peter made his great confession that Jesus is the Christ. In light of that confession, the Lord then declared that to be one of His disciples we must take up our cross and follow Him.

Six days later, the Christ leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain and is transfigured before their very eyes. His appearance changed. His face shone like the sun, His clothes became white as light. This is God in human flesh and blood.

For 30 or so years, His divine glory was hidden to human eyes. The angel declared to the shepherds that the newborn Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes was Christ the Lord. But there wasn’t any quantifiable evidence that Jesus was God. After His baptism, the Lord began to teach and even perform miracles but His appearance was so ordinary. He looked and acted thoroughly human. That’s what caused such difficulty for the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders. Jesus claims to be God but He looks so plain.

Maybe He's a prophet. They performed miracles: raising the dead, making axe heads float, predicting the future, miraculously extending oil and flour during a famine, etc. But none of them claimed to be God in human flesh and blood. Jesus' divine nature was hidden behind His human flesh and blood.

That leads us to the Father's first statement, "This is my beloved Son." Jesus is the Son of the Father. The Nicene Creed describes Jesus as "God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father..." This is who the Christ is. Fully and complete God hidden in human flesh and blood. This is the Christ we are to follow daily even unto death; God and man in one person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The events on the Mount of Transfiguration give us a glimpse of Jesus' divine identity. Before this event, that fact had been proclaimed and received by faith. Now that truth is seen and experienced by Peter, James, and John. But make no mistake about it dear saints of God. Jesus of Nazareth is the divine, beloved Son of the Father full of grace and truth.

The Father then proclaims that He is well pleased with His beloved Son (vs. 5). It's pretty natural for parents to be pleased with their children. As a father, I am pleased with my 4 children simply because they are my children. I am pleased with them because they are gifts of God regardless of their actions, good or bad.

The Father has already declared that He loves His Son in vs. 5. Within the Holy Trinity, each person is fully pleased with the others. Their fellowship is perfect, holy, and complete. So, might there be more to the Father's statement to Peter, James, and John about Him being pleased with His Son? I think so.

Luke's gospel may help a little bit here. His retelling of the Mount of Transfiguration reveals that Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about His forthcoming exodus that He would accomplish in Jerusalem. Our Lord's exodus refers to His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, followed by His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension back to the right hand of His Father. John 3:16–17 declares that the Father gives and sends His Son so that the world might be saved. The giving and sending of the Son refers primarily to the events of the Lord's exodus. And we mustn't forget that at our Lord's baptism in the Jordan River, God the Father declared that He was pleased with His beloved Son who had just submitted Himself to a sinner's baptism. That baptism set His path to Jerusalem: triumphal entry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

God the Father is pleased with His Son because of His obedience (i.e., Son's obedience) to His will (i.e., Father's will) to save the world. Jesus is the obedient Son who submits Himself to the authority of His Father (I Corinthians 15:27–28).

Jesus willingly accepts the Father's plan to save His people, to save you and me. And what joy it gave the Son to take up this divine mission. The writer of the book of Hebrews says about Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Heb 12:2). Jesus is no begrudging Son going through the motions of obedience only to despise His Father's will in His heart and mind. Perish the thought. Jesus found the Father's will to save us complete joy even though He would endure the agonies of humanity's sin and death.

Jesus' love for His Father and for us transcends human comprehension. Through His willing obedience to the Father, we are made sons and daughters of God. Through Jesus, we are heirs of the Father's eternal kingdom. Through Jesus, humanity is exalted to a place of honor that even baffles the angels according to I Peter 1:12. Is it any wonder then why the Father is pleased with His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus? He is the perfect, obedient Son who accomplishes the impossible. Thanks be to Jesus.

And now we give attention to the Father's final comment regarding Jesus, "listen to him" (vs. 5). We must remember that the Father is speaking these words originally to Peter, James, and John. Those 3 disciples not only saw the transfigured, glorified Jesus but also the glorified Moses and Elijah. This was truly a supernatural moment. And Peter wants to make three tents, three shrines. One for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The effect to place Jesus on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah.

God the Father would have none of that. Listen to Jesus. He's greater than the Law given through Moses. Jesus is greater than the prophetic message pronounced through Elijah and the prophets. Jesus is far superior to the Law and the Prophets. Listen to Jesus. This is in fact the take home message for today. Listen to Jesus.

The past few weeks we've heard Jesus' authoritative teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. It's been challenging to say the least. A number of times in Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said by those of old..." In other words, you've heard what all the teachers and preachers have been saying about this or that topic. On each occasion, the Lord counters by saying, "But I say to you..." In other words, listen to what I say. I am the last, authoritative word. All others must bow to the authority of

the Lord Jesus, that includes the exalted Moses, Elijah, and anyone else you might think to mention.

Jesus is the Beloved, well-pleasing Son of God the Father. That's why we are to listen to Him. That's why we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We can't follow Moses and the 10 Commandments and hope to be saved. We can't follow the preaching of Elijah and the prophets and hope to win eternal life. Only listening to Jesus fulfills the deepest longings of our hearts and souls. Listen to Jesus, dear saints. Listen to Jesus.

The disciples heard the Father's 5 second sermon and, according to vs. 6, they fell on their faces terrified. I'm pleased to see that no one is responding to my 15 minute sermon with fear and trembling. But it is significant to see what happens next. Vs. 7–8, "But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only."

The three disciples were given an immediate opportunity to Listen to Jesus, "Rise, and have no fear." The awesome presence of God the Father that creates such fear and trembling in sinful human beings is gone. The accusing voice of Moses and the Law is silenced. The zealous preaching of the prophets is muted.

Listen to Jesus, dear saints. "Rise, and have no fear." I am with you says Jesus. I forgive all your sins, past, present, and future, declares the Lord. You are mine for eternity because the Father has given you to me and no one can snatch you out of My hands promises the Lord Jesus. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, says Jesus. Listen to Jesus people of God.

We don't need a Mount of Transfiguration-type experience. We have the word of Jesus, the beloved, well-pleasing Son of the Father. Rise, and have no fear.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.