

Transfiguring Our Commonplace Lives.

Text: Mat 17:1-15

Suggested Hymns:

306, 747a, 597a, 287, 330

- 1) Jesus transfigures our lives
- 2) Our transfigured lives removes fear
- 3) Our transfigured lives comforts us
- 4) Our transfigured lives at the cross

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 17:1-15, ¹ *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;* ² *and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.* ³ *And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.*

⁴ *Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”*

⁵ *While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* ⁶ *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.* ⁷ *But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.”* ⁸ *When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

⁹ *Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”* ¹⁰ *And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”* ¹¹ *Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.* ¹² *“But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”* ¹³ *Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.*

¹⁴ *And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying,* ¹⁵ *“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic*

and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.
(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The account of the transfiguration of Jesus must not be detached or disassociated from the healing of the epileptic boy whom Jesus met as He returned to the valley from the mountain of Transfiguration. The two scenes supplement each other. So glorious was this experience that the three disciples wanted to stay there. For Peter, James, and John this would have been ideal, a real place without care or worry, but the people milling at the foot of the mountain would have found life hopeless and helpless and discouraging.

Therefore Jesus refuses to have tents of complacency built on the mountaintop and comes down into the plains where the people are, to transfigure their commonplace lives. That is where Jesus belongs, right in the centre of our living, to find solutions for our problems, and give us security amid the changing years of life. As He comes into our hectic, everyday living, Jesus brings peace to our hearts, hope into our lives, and forgiveness to our souls. Jesus reveals to us His compassionate love through the cross. May the Lord bless our meditation on this Transfiguration Sunday.

1. Jesus Transfigures Our Lives

Jesus transfigures our commonplace lives by removing from them the drabness and sameness of the monotonous routine. Even boys and girls find the day too long with the same pattern week after week. They get up in the morning for a quick breakfast, hurry to school, come home to look at TV, and go to bed. *"The same old thing every day,"* they say. Looking for a change and craving for excitement and thrills, they get themselves into mischievous trouble.

We too are like that. We do not want to be by ourselves. Every day we want something different and exciting. The sameness is boring. Out of such a life came Peter, James, and John. After the hard mountain climb they came to the top, away from the sordid things of the day. There they saw a glory which had taken their breath away. Enthusiastically they exclaim, *"Lord, it is good to*

be here! Let us make three tents and stay!” To camp here on the hilltop would be wonderful, “*out of this world.*”

The three had come from the valley where they had encountered exhausted people — grimy, ugly, leprous. They had seen beggars — blind, and diseased. In that vale of tears they had watched unscrupulous men cheating, carrying on shady deals, overcharging widows and orphans, lying to and defrauding the shoppers in the markets.

This was a money-focussed and greedy world, corruption and crime and deceit lifting its head in many places. The three disciples had gotten away from this sort of life and seen on the top of this mountain a glory without a single distorted view. Therefore the plea “*Let us stay here and forget the valley!*”

However, the solution to the ills of life cannot be found in burying your head, like an ostrich, in the sands of time. We will never find the answer to life’s problems by closing our eyes to the misery we find around us, by seeking hideaways for selfish and self-pleasing contemplation.

We cannot live in the clouds, refusing to face the realities of each day. All of us must admit that it is far more pleasant and enjoyable to climb to some vantage point and see the scenery with one panoramic sweep than to look at a small specific spot with anthills and weeds, litter and rags, rubbish heaps and trash.

However, our mission in life directs us to service and sacrifice. We are to travel the Jericho road of the day to help the wounded and the sick and the hungry. As Christians we are to tell the story of Christ’s Gospel that fallen man may look up and hope, finding healing from sin and peace with God through the Cross.

In Christ’s kingdom ease is disregarded. We are to work while it is day. For this reason Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration into the commonplace walks of life. Jesus had talked with Moses and Elijah about the cross, about the cost of redeeming the souls of sinful man.

There could be no heaven for humanity if Jesus selfishly had remained in glory. The only solution for a lost world, travelling on without hope and peace to an ultimate despair, is found in the cross of Calvary. There Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and died for our sins.

And we believers are passing through this world in order to bring the Gospel to the unbelieving masses, where they are, in the valley of burdens and tears, and in a monotonous, hopeless routine. Through Christ the joy of forgiveness will bring sunshine into their lives and the peace of God will enable them to look forward with courage and upward with faith.

Paul's Thinking

Paul struggles with this same thought as he writes to the Philippian Christians. His personal desire was to die and be with Christ in glory. Then all his problems would be solved and his trials would be over.

However, this immediate departure to heaven would not be helpful to the people who still were without hope in this world. Therefore he prays to stay that He might continue his mission of preaching Christ and Him Crucified. For this reason he asks the Philippians to pray likewise that the Word may not be bound but reach more and more people every day.

You may have heard the story of *Simon Stylites*, who had himself hoisted to the top of an ancient column to get away from the world of people and live there in pious meditation. The legend says that an angel, after some time, appeared to the hermit and urged him to come down. As he did, the angel led him to the home of a gooseherd, who was tending his geese under rather adverse conditions. In the frugal home of the herder, Simon found a girl whose parents had been killed when the girl was but a tiny child. The gooseherd had taken her to his home and heart, had shared with her his bare necessities, and given her his love and devotion.

There the angel left Simon, who caught the meaning of it all. He too should remain in the valley to help, to serve, and to sacrifice in the commonplace lives of discouraged people. This would be more pleasing to God.

We must help people where they are. That is why Jesus came down from the mountain to help the epileptic and the physically handicapped. As from day to day we go on meeting people, we should bear witness to Christ, who left His glory to bring salvation through His cross. This glad news alone takes the drabness and hopelessness out of our hearts and days, and enables us to go forward toward that day when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes and

when, washed white in the blood of the sacrificial Christ, we sing the hallelujahs of heaven forever and ever. Only through Jesus are our lives transfigured.

2. Our Transfigured Life Removes Fear

Jesus transfigures our humdrum lives by removing our fears as we cope with the aggravating realities of life. We have fears within, due to the accusations of our conscience. We have sinned, and we cannot deny this. We have fears without, due to the problems of human relationships. We find it difficult to get along with certain people. We are distrustful and suspicious of them.

Jesus helps us as we attempt to get along with unlovable people. He died for the ungodly, yes, for us, while we were yet sinners. As men tortured Him by nailing Him to the cross, Jesus prayed, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*¹ Listen to what Paul writes from the dungeon in Rome, *“I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. ... I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”*²

Moses and Elijah had been speaking with Jesus on the mount. Moses gave God’s Law to mankind, and Elijah had decreed the judgments of God upon man’s disobedience to the Law. Law and judgment fill us with fear. Our sin and guilt rise to condemn us. However, when Peter, James, and John looked up out of the cloud they saw Jesus only. Only Jesus saves. He is the Rock of Ages in which we must hide. There the Law cannot condemn us, and the judgment cannot separate us from our forgiving God in Christ.

In Jesus Christ, then, life has meaning, has comfort and relief, and has hope. No matter what fears and misgivings we have, through the Cross our God speaks forgiveness and peace to our troubled heart. This transfigures and transforms our daily life no matter how hectic and depressing it may be.

3. Our Transfigured Life Comforts Us

Jesus transfigures our life by comforting us in our sorrows. Our mind is put at ease by the glorious promise of the risen Lord *“Because I live, you will live also.”*³ In our daily life sunshine and shadows hug each other. This is illustrated in the story of the unfortunate boy who is in great distress. To live with such an affliction is heart-rending. We see here a situation which is desperate and in which the family stands by helpless.

Our life situation may not be identical, yet too often we come down from the mountaintop of our dreams and ideals, and find them shattered in the face of sorrow, sickness, and death. As we come to grips with these realities of life, we cannot explain nor understand the why and the wherefore of all and find no solution. The father of the boy with hands tied, as we say, pleads, *Have mercy on my son, who is physically ill. Have mercy on my son, who is mentally sick. Have mercy on my son, who is spiritually distressed.*

The father believes that hope and help can come through Jesus, who has left the glories of heaven to enter our commonplace lives of endless heartaches and tears. As Jesus meets this father and son, He gives help by freeing the boy. The deliverance is specific and definite. Jesus comes into our sorrowing life bringing a new hope which puts courage into our heart. He leads us to victory over every difficult situation in life.

The hymnist writes in hymn 306,

*I find in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.⁴*

Jesus always does the greater — He heals us from the guilt of sin. After sin has done its worst physically, mentally, and spiritually, Jesus comes to our rescue, abundantly pardons, and promises that we will not perish. We may sink, we may fall, we will even die, but never will we perish coming to Jesus, believing that He is our Lord, Saviour, and Friend. After sin and sorrow have done their worst, damning us to despair, Jesus comes with healing in His wings and opens the door to life eternal. This promise transfigures our life and makes us children of grace and guarantees us salvation.

4. Our Transfigured Life Lives at the Cross

All this removing of the humdrum, the fear, the sorrows, Jesus does by means of the Cross. This is the message which we find and must read into the Gospel for today. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talked about this journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus was to die so that we might be lifted out of the darkness of sin and be unshackled from the fetters of fear. Jesus does all His healing through the Cross. He puts Himself, through this Cross, where He belongs, right into the heart of our commonplace lives and the centre of our living. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. This is His mission.

However, we discover — and this is important to know — that Jesus helps us through our own cross, trials, and difficulties. *“Take up [your] cross, and follow Me,”* we hear Jesus say.⁵ The father of the afflicted son never would have sought Jesus had his son been well. Trouble brought him to Jesus.

Surely, we must also confess and admit that our unsolvable troubles and burdensome crosses have brought us closer to Jesus? God had to shut us in and close out the pleasures of life, the successes of the day, to bring us to the realisation that we cannot live by bread alone. We are more than vegetating animals. We have souls whose redemption is imperative.

So the transfiguration of Jesus and His return to the valley where we are proclaims to us who live in this world — sordid with sin, stricken with grief and sorrow, guilt and tears — that only one can save. Jesus must come and abide.

And from the mountain called Calvary He comes with outstretched, pierced, and bleeding hands and pleads: *“Come. Be not afraid. Come, and find healing of body, mind, and soul. Come. I am God’s beloved Son and your Saviour!”* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 23:34

² Philippians 4:11-13

³ John 14:19

⁴ (Horatio Bonar), Hymn 306

⁵ Luke 9:23