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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
2/14/2010, Transfiguration Sunday
Also, Valentine's Day
Fathers and Sons

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In this sermon, I mean to speak of fathers and sons, but also of the look of love that can illumine a room, the happiness on the face that can light up the place. My text is from this morning's story of the Transfiguration of Our Lord.

³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35, RSV)

It was an off-hand remark, not in the published sermon, but a couple Sundays ago I mentioned that my wife Carol and I often going through a little conversational dance on Saturdays. Carol says to me, "What are you going to preach about tomorrow?" I always answer, "Love, sweet love." And she always answers, "That's good." And so it should certainly be today, for today is Valentine's Day. Love, sweet love, should indeed be my theme.

But the interesting challenge for a preacher is that this great theme of love must always be related to the assigned Bible readings for the day. So, that's what I am setting out to do: to relate love, sweet love, to the Transfiguration of our Lord. Let's see how it goes.

The first three Gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - all tell the story of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, and they all follow that story with the one about the healing of the poor, demon-possessed boy. Preachers often point out that this sequence teaches us that life is not always a rose garden, and that often the beautiful mountaintop experience is followed by hard ministry amidst the sorrows of this world. I think this lesson is exactly right. We do not always dwell on the beautiful mountaintop, but often down in this veil of tears where it is hard going.

But what I want to do in this sermon is to focus this theme on Jesus himself. Jesus too must leave the mountaintop and go down to the village where there is much sadness and suffering.

Jesus once preached about "much being required":

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:
(Luke 12:48, KJV)

My idea is that on top of yon mountain, much was entrusted to Jesus, and in the story of the demoniac boy, Jesus began to pay back. And he continued to pay back until the job was done and human salvation won.

What was entrusted to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? I mean his Father's love, his Father's approval, his Father's delight. These were entrusted to Jesus, and in the strength of that love, Jesus set out to do battle with sin, death, and the devil.

And so I want to talk a bit about "fathers and sons." I am aiming to talk about the relationship of God the Father and God the Son, but let me begin by talking simply of earthly fathers and sons. I bet what I have to say could also be said of mothers and sons or mothers and daughters, but I am simply a father, and so that is what I will talk about.

So, let me tell you this: It would do my heart an awful lot of good to see my father again. If I had journeyed off into a far land, but could suddenly meet Dad in a coffee shop somewhere and receive some encouragement from him, my! that would help me along in this world. Dad died of cancer at age forty-five. I've gone through most of my grown-up life without my father. And so I say it would do my soul good to see my father again.

And going the other way round, it also does my soul much good to gaze at my own sons. When a father looks at his son, his heart lifts. Partly it is because in the face of his son, he also sees his beloved, his wife. But there is more too. Also in looking at the son, the father sees goodness and hope, the father is reminded that this world contains beauty, this world has that which is precious, for it has his sons. We poor men tend to be inarticulate about this. We hardly know what to say, but I'm telling you, the relationship between fathers and sons is very close.

You saw last Sunday's Super Bowl, I bet you did. And did you see the television interview with Drew Brees at the end of that game? Drew was the winning quarterback of the New Orleans Saints. He held his one-year-old son in that moment of triumph. He held little Baylen Brees. Mother or father had placed headphones on his son so that the noise of the Super Bowl would not frighten him, and the child was not frightened. He just rested there comfortably in the arms of his father and gazed at the world around, at peace.¹ Fathers and son: it's a near and dear relationship, I say.

Even more so must it have been good for the soul of Jesus to be so very close to his heavenly Father there on that mountaintop. For if any son had left home and journeyed to a far country, it was the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. No comparison exists between heaven and this fallen world. In heaven, he was adored. He was adored by all the heavenly hosts, by angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, patriarchs and prophets and holy men and women of old. But when Jesus was made incarnate as a human person like you and me, he became enmeshed in a world with more than its share of sin and heartbreak. And he became vulnerable to danger, yea, to a danger that would one day kill him.

¹ Drew Brees and his wife Brittany welcomed their first child, a son named Baylen Robert Brees on January 15, 2009 which was also Brees' 30th birthday. [\[25\]](#)

But on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus was close to his heavenly Father again. Our text suggests that Jesus was so lost in prayer to his heavenly Father that his face shone with the glory of his divine fellowship.

I've seen such a phenomenon before: the shining of the face, of the whole being. In fact, I saw it in the wedding ceremony of our Will and Rebecca Dunn. We are going to be praying the Farewell and Godspeed prayers for them at the end of this liturgy. They are off for Michigan. But I will remember their wedding. You should have seen those two as they exchanged their wedding vows. There was love, sweet love. The love in their hearts rather burst forth into light in their eyes and on their faces as they spoke and as they heard those great vows binding them to one another.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord was even more striking. No fuller could have washed his robes so white as that. No photographer's lighting setup could have made our Lord's face shine like this:

²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. (Luke 9:29, RSV)

This transfiguration of our Lord revealed him as he really is: our Beautiful Saviour, which is the hymn we will sing at the end of this liturgy. The light emanating from him was like a flash of lightning frozen in place and astonishing the disciples.

Then, there is a most touching scene. Impetuous Peter has blurted out something about setting up three booths. But the heavenly Father simply zooms on by that, as if Peter has missed the point. The point is love. You have heard proud mothers and fathers before. Let that guide you in the way you read and hear the heartfelt exclamation of the heavenly Father:

³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is *my Son*, my Chosen; listen to him!"

My Son! My Beloved! Oh, what a world of affection is contained in such a cry!

On the mountaintop, then, Jesus basks in the light of his Father's fellowship and affection. And to whom much is entrusted, much is required. So, Jesus marches on down that mountain in the strength of his Father's love and does battle for humanity. He heals that poor demon-possessed child, thereby restoring another son to another father. The child had been shattered by that demon. The boy had been cast to the ground, left foaming, terrifying the father, I am sure, and breaking his heart. The disciples could not do this. They could not defeat this demon. But Jesus does. It is a symbol of the ministry that lies ahead of him. Fortified by his heavenly Father's love, he goes forth to wage battle against terrible forces. He goes out, I say, to love.

And now for us. I end with this thought: If you love or if you know yourself to be loved, then much has been entrusted to you and much is required of you.

Sometimes, this is perfectly obvious. When Carol and I faced each other, held hands, and exchanged our wedding vows more than twenty-seven years ago now, I knew perfectly well that much had been entrusted to me and that much was asked of me in return. It has made life good. Likewise, when I held our newborn sons in my arms, I knew that much had been entrusted to Carol and me, and much required. It has made life good. When Will and Rebecca held hands and exchanged their wedding vows, it was clear to all in the room that they understood that much had been entrusted to them, much required, and this is good. And for any of you who are in love, I say, Happy Valentine's Day. Much has been entrusted to you and much required.

The capstone of all this concerns each of us, for now we are invited to the Blessed Sacrament. I believe that the reason the Church is and should be such a blessing on earth is that each of us gets to head out the door this morning knowing that we are among those in this world who are loved. Aye, we are loved most profoundly. We are loved to the surrender of Life itself for our sake. Let us go out then knowing that much is entrusted to us, even heaven itself, and that nothing ultimately can be lost as we spend this divine favor on love for our neighbors, through the grace and merits of our Beautiful Saviour, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.