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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
2/15/2015, The Transfiguration of our Lord  
Mark 9:2-9

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

...and he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. (Mark 9:2-3, RSV)

On that holy mountain, Peter, James, and John experienced something that could well have braced them for the hard road ahead. Soon they will come down from that mountain and follow their Master toward Jerusalem. Jesus will stride on ahead of them, knowing full well that he goes to his death. His disciples will follow behind him, nervous, fearful, and distressed by his talk of the cross. But as these three disciples follow on behind Jesus, at least they can recall that for one glorious moment, they beheld something of the beauty of their Master.

Indeed, they do recall it for the remainder of their days. As mature theologians they will speak of it. Saint Peter, for example, writes this:

<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*. <sup>17</sup>For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” <sup>18</sup>we heard this voice borne from heaven, for *we were with him on the holy mountain*. (2 Peter 1:16-18, RSV)

Likewise Saint John testifies to having beheld the glory of Jesus:

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; *we have beheld his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14, RSV)

There is something satisfying to the soul to see with one’s own eyes a great experience — the kind of experience that can carry you through many a mile, many a heartache, and many a joy.

## **SUCH EXPERIENCES FOR YOU**

I hope that you have been blessed with such fortifying experiences in your life. I bet you have. I bet the Lord has blessed you with some foundational events to which you hearken back from time to time, to stay on track in life.

Perhaps it was your Holy Confirmation — perhaps even here in this church. I would like our upcoming Confirmations to be such bracing events in the life of our current class of confirmands. They are on track to be confirmed this coming Pentecost Sunday, May 24. I have invited Bishop Rimbo to be with us then. I think it should be a moving event when the Bishop anoints the eyes and hands and feet of our children, one by one, and claims them for Christ. I hope that our young people will remember for the rest of their lives what will happen that day, and in remembering, be made strong.

And since this particular Sunday is so close to Valentine's Day, let me speak of another transcendent event that many of us have enjoyed. I mean Holy Marriage. As long as the Lord grants me memory at all, I expect I will recall with joy that good day when Carol stood with me, took my hand, and we promised to love each other henceforth, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death." What joy, comfort, and orientation in life that good day has given me all these years — thirty-two years now.

Likewise with my ordination to the Holy Ministry. It is because of that liturgy, nearly thirty years ago now, that I have been privileged to be called "Pastor." I have tried to live up to the call to be a guardian of souls.

You have had similar bracing experiences, I am quite sure. Who can look at your newborn child, for example, and not know deep in your bones that life has changed forever and that life has become better? When your son or your daughter looks at you and thinks that you are a good man, a good woman, it changes you. It makes you want to be a good man, a good woman. It is a kind of mountaintop experience. You look at your child, and it makes you want to be better.

Who can take the solemn vows of a profession, to be a physician, a judge, a firefighter, a soldier, a Marine, and not find yourself remembering your vow from time to time and thereby getting back on the good road?

Peter, James, and John had such a fortifying experience up there on the Mount of Transfiguration.

## **A TRUER VISION**

And perhaps we can phrase the challenge of the Christian life this way: The trick in life is to judge that foundational vision to be more important and more true than the vision that lies before your eyes in the day of temptation and discouragement.

Let's develop this idea by looking at these three disciples, Peter, James, and John. Err long these three will see another dramatic image. It will appall them. Before long, their vision on the Mount of Transfiguration will be replaced by a

terrible vision on Mount Calvary. Soon, the transfigured Jesus, with garments whiter than any fuller on earth can make them, will be replaced by the beaten and haggard Jesus, stripped of his garments, and dying on a cross. Which vision is more important? Which image is more true?

If it were not for the resurrection, it would be natural to say that the final scene is the decisive one. For the final scene is the one that yields death, the end of the story *if* there be no resurrection. The vision that would rock the souls of Peter, James, and John for the remainder of their days would not be the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration, but the bloody scene on Mount Calvary *if* there be no resurrection. If there be no resurrection, then Peter, James, and John could join those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, talking about what might have been:

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel...  
(Luke 24:21, RSV)

Likewise, Peter, James, and John could have thought to themselves, “Did not our hearts burn within us when we saw him transfigured on the holy mountain? But, alas, all is blown away by his crucifixion!”

It is Easter that decides the matter. In the great confrontation between the beautiful vision on the holy mountain and the horrifying vision on Calvary, truth belongs to the Mount of Transfiguration.

## **THE HOSPITAL ROOM**

Earlier this week, when I visited dear Ann Siemer at the hospital, it was as if I could see one vision being displaced by a better vision. You know or can imagine what a hospital room is like. It is not home. You have been ripped away from home because you are in some trouble and you hope the hospital can help. You see tubes and medicines and doctors and nurses. You might feel pain in your body and weariness in your bones. There is not a whole lot that is lovely to behold. But when we were celebrating the Holy Communion there at the hospital bed, remembering our Beautiful Saviour, even recalling the hymn by that name which we have sung so often... when we recalled our Beautiful Savior and heard him say to Ann and to me, “I did it for you. I give my body and my blood for you,” then that vision somehow calmed us, as if this is more true than anything else on this old earth.

Indeed, it *is* true with a truth that will ring out through all eternity.

## **THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS**

In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for Peter, James, and John, for the other disciples, and through them for us too. Jesus prayed that you and I will be included in a great vision like Peter, James, and John experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration. As I read aloud our Lord’s priestly petition, try to take it to heart and apply it to yourself:

<sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, *to behold my glory* which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24, RSV)

It is a sight that will thrill us: to behold forever the glory of our Beautiful Saviour.

Let whatever glimpse you already have of that holy vision be for you the truest of visions. Give that vision space in your heart when you are discouraged or tempted or exhausted. Let what you have come to know of Jesus brace you for the days and miles ahead. And in this manner, live for him and for others in his name, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.