

The Transfiguration Matthew 17:1-8

February 23, 2020

1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John 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 dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone (NRSV).

Scripture starts six days later. Jesus was preaching and teaching throughout the countryside and he went to Caesarea Philippi. While they are there Peter proclaims "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Bible tells us that from that point on Jesus began to show his disciples that he has to go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and raised on third day. He doesn't just tell them, but show them, teach them and demonstrate this to them. Peter just doesn't get it. He denies that this should happen to Jesus. The way Jesus responds to this may seem unusual to us at first. Peter's denial triggers a strong response from Jesus "Get behind me Satan!" What is going on here is that Jesus is trying to teach Peter a vital lesson about the very nature of Jesus and his reason for being here. Notice the theme of the lesson is the same theme that runs through Bible. It is the contrast between divine nature and human nature. It is the same fundamental problem since the very beginning. Jesus has this strong response because Peter's position is still of the earth. Jesus says you are setting your mind on human things, not on divine things. It is a common biblical problem where the wants of humanity clash with the will of God.

Our Scripture today takes place six days after Jesus began to show his disciples that he has to go to Jerusalem where he will suffer, die, and be raised. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him up the mountain to where Jesus was transfigured before them. Today is transfiguration Sunday. It marks a specific time on the Christian calendar. It occurs on the Sunday before Lent. Today's Scripture describes the transfiguration of Jesus like this; his face shined like the sun and his clothes dazzled white. When Jesus face shines and his clothes become luminous it is not because he has somehow mutated, it is because of who he is, it is a sign of his glory. Appearing with him is Moses and Elijah. Peter once again doesn't quite get it. Six days before this Jesus rebuked him for setting his mind on human things instead of divine things. Here he is once again with a human mind set and a failure to grasp divine reality. Peter tries to tell Jesus what needs to be done instead of listening to him. So, a voice from the cloud interrupts him. Actually this is the voice of God from heaven. Once again the Bible reveals the providence of God. A bright cloud overshadowed them and proclaims "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Matthew tells us that when Jesus was baptized voice from heaven said "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased" (Mat. 3:17). Matthew makes sure that the readers know that Jesus is the Son of God and that this is proclaimed by God. The disciples were scared and fell to the ground. They were not scared by the unusual things that they were seeing. It is the authoritative, almighty voice of God that scared them. Then a loving and caring Jesus

touched them in a gesture of healing and reassurance. When they looked up all they could see was Jesus.

What if all you could see is Jesus? Wouldn't it be nice if all we could see is Jesus? I was recently engaged in a conversation with a Christian friend that has trouble sleeping at night. My suggestion was to think about Jesus. Sometimes we go to bed with worry about things that happened today or things we have to do tomorrow. We often worry about relationships and finances. Well, when you close your eyes and all I can see is Jesus, then you have peace. Wouldn't it be nice if all you could see is Jesus? Replace the anxiety from the cares of the world with the peace and tranquility of Jesus. I know it's easier said than done but try it and see. Focus on Jesus. Wouldn't it be nice if all you could see is Jesus? The next person that you meet you see Jesus within that person; the homeless, the poor, the hungry, and the angry. Wouldn't it be nice if the next time something frustrating happens, you could just close your eyes and all you can see is Jesus? All the discomfort, frustration, and anxiety disappear leaving you with the calm and peaceful presence of Jesus.

Jesus is embarking upon a death march to Jerusalem. That's why he goes through this transfiguration. It is his glory. The human perspective of crucifixion is that of a victim, it is sad and depressing where the person is despised and rejected by the world. But within the heavenly realm his face and clothes gleam with the favor of God. He is not a victim but a victor beloved and well pleasing to God. Look at him and listen to him.