

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

A chaplain at a psychiatric hospital was conducting a small group meeting. As he was trying to get people to open up a bit and share some of their history with him, he asked them, “why are you here?” One of the men responded quickly and clearly: “We are here, because we aren’t all there.”

Why are we here? With all the snow and the cold, it would seem to be easier to stay at home, yet here we are. For some of us, we do it out of habit. We have always gone to church on Sunday, and we know it is important that we continue to do so. Jesus Himself had this ‘habit’, for we told, *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.* (Luke 4:16 - ESV) May God grant all of us this habit in our life! Some of us are here, because we have to be here. We have responsibilities, such as ushering, singing, teaching, or preaching. We are here because we know that God calls us together. We are told: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24-25 - ESV) If that isn’t enough, God commands us to *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”* (Exodus 20:8, ESV)

More than anything else, I do hope that we are here because we can’t imagine being anywhere else on Sunday morning. We want to be in the Lord’s house, to hear the Word of the Lord, and to enjoy being together with our brothers and sisters in our Father’s house. We are here to see the glory of the Lord, and to share in the blessings He bestows upon His people.

Behind all of those things, there is another reason to be here. We need to be here, because, when it comes right down to it, we aren’t all there. Like it or not, we are not the people God created us to be. By our own strength, we cannot be all that we are to be. There is a problem that we can’t fix, a disease in us that we can’t cure. The sin that is in us, that clings to us and so often controls our thoughts, our words, and our actions keeps us from being the people God created us to be. It keeps us from enjoying the fulness of life that God wants us to have. But in the glory of the Transfiguration, which we remember today, we are given the assurance that what we cannot do for ourselves, our God does for us. The Lord of glory—the very God of heaven and earth—comes among us to save us. He comes to restore us. He comes to make us whole again. That is why it is good for us to be here as our Lord reveals His glory to us, assuring us in that revelation of His glory of the victory He will bring to us, the victory that brings us forgiveness and life; the victory that enables us to share in His glory.

Whenever I read this account of the transfiguration, I have to admit to being envious of Peter, James and John. How blessed they were to have seen this wonderful revelation of Jesus’ true glory! How exciting it must have been for them to be on the mountain that day. But I can imagine that they didn’t necessarily feel that way at first. Our text tells us that Jesus took these three disciples *up a high mountain by themselves*. While it must have been wonderful to think that they were part of Jesus’ ‘inner circle’, I can almost see Peter wondering, “what are we doing here?” He would not likely have questioned Jesus about this. He would simply follow the master, especially when he had been personally invited on this journey. But at the same time, I think he would wonder about the rationale of this trip. Here they were, in the heat of the day, going mountain climbing. Why would Jesus want to bring them so far away from the other disciples, and so far away from the rest of civilization? This journey up a “high mountain” was not a nice little afternoon hike. It took some work. What could be so important? What could be worth all the effort?

I wonder if we often feel the same way about our gathering together on Sunday morning. In many ways, we have lost the

uniqueness of Sunday. Yet most people will tell you it is the only day they have to relax, to sleep in, or to do things with the family. I do pray that more of our members would recognize that we worship as a family, and that we find our true rest in the Lord. Jesus says: ***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** (Matthew 11:28 - ESV) But for many, it seems that the real labour is in getting up and going to church. We have to fight with the kids to get up and get dressed. It is still winter and that means it could be cold and icy; we'll have to scrape the car, or shovel out the driveway. If it were summer we would complain that it is too hot to get dressed up, and the church isn't air-conditioned. Why do we want to go to all that trouble? It is so much easier just to sleep in, have a nice leisurely breakfast, and enjoy the day. Is it really going to make all that much difference if we don't get to church this week?

But let's go back to Peter, James and John. I don't think they necessarily enjoyed their trek up the mountain, but that was where the Lord was leading them. Once they got to the top of the mountain though, things were different. Our text says: ***And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.*** If the disciples had wondered why they were on this trek, all doubt disappeared in that moment. Now, they wouldn't have missed it for the world. It was the most glorious thing they had ever seen. They are given a small glimpse of the true glory of their Saviour and Lord. With Him are Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Luke fills in some details, telling us that they ***spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*** (Luke 9:31 - ESV) They talked about the events that would come as Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time before His death.

As the glory of the moment overwhelms them, the disciples forget their tired bodies. Peter blurts out: ***"Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."*** Peter doesn't want this wonderful event to end. It is good to be here, to enjoy this moment, and to revel in Your glory. Now there is the voice from heaven, as God declares: ***"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."***

With this confirmation that Jesus is doing all that He has been sent to do, everything returned to normal, just as suddenly as it had begun. Moses and Elijah were gone. Jesus looked as He always had. But the disciples were different because of this revelation of God's glory. Only one thing would have more impact on them than this revelation, and that was the appearance of the risen Lord on Easter Sunday. John would remember this day and declare: ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*** (John 1:14 - ESV) Peter would remember this day and write: ***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. 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," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*** (2 Peter 1:16-19 - ESV)

So, what does all of this have to do with us today? Let us start by asking again, "why are we here?" Remember that we need to be here, because we aren't all there. We need to be here so the Lord can make us whole again. So often we try to live our lives apart from the help, strength and support that our Lord wants to give us. So often we ignore the encouragement that our Father seeks to give us. Still, our Lord invites us here for the same reason that Jesus took Peter, James and John up on that mountain. He brings us here to see and to share in His glory. In our worship and through His Word, the glory of the Lord shines through our sin, guilt and frustration; shining with the assurance of life and salvation. In this revelation of God's glory, we have a privilege that even Peter, James and John did not have. We look back in faith to all that Jesus has accomplished for us. We are blessed in knowing the wonderful grace of the Saviour, who set aside His true heavenly glory, who came into this world of sin and sorrow in order to give His own holy, sinless life as a ransom for all. It was not a very glorious sight when Jesus died on the cross, but without that sacrificial death, we would have no hope of glory. He died there to pay the price of our sinfulness and to take away the power that sin has over us. He came to give His life to make us whole again, to cleanse us and make us pure and spotless before our God. He died in great humility, but that death is transformed into the greatest victory of all, the greatest glory of all, for He destroys the very power of death itself as He rises again to live in the fulness of His glory forevermore. And the risen Lord declares to His people: ***Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.*** (John 14:19 - ESV) He promises to all who trust in Him that they will share in His glory, a glory even greater than that which Peter, James and John witnessed on the mount of Transfiguration.

So, why are we here? We are here to see the glory of the Lord, and to rejoice that His glory is our salvation. We are here to celebrate the assurance of our forgiveness and life in Christ. We are here to share together in all the fulness of life in Christ. And it is good to be here! It is good to come together and be fed by our God, with His Word of life. It is good that we can come

to His table and be fed with the very body and blood of Christ given for our salvation. It is good to share with our brothers and sisters the glory that is ours through Christ, that glorious life in Christ that will endure in its fulness forever. It is good to be here, so let's enjoy it, as we celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the blessings that are ours in Christ. Amen.