

Luke 9:33

Transfiguration Sunday (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Deuteronomy 34:1–12; Hebrews 3:1–6; Luke 9:28–36

It (Really, Really, Really) Is Good to Be Here!

March 2, 2025

“Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It was almost 14 years ago, when I was installed as the pastor of Foothills Lutheran Church. On that day, my dear friend, colleague and classmate, Pastor Tom Prachar preached the sermon, looking at God’s question to the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb: ***“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*** (1 Kings 19:9, ESV) The text tells us how Elijah was fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel and feeling that his work for the Lord was unimportant or fruitless. Pastor Prachar reminded me and this congregation that the Lord calls His servants; He leads them to the work He will have them do. He is the strength of those who serve in the name of the Lord, and He works to accomplish His plans and purposes.

What are you doing here? It was the Lord called me through you and who led me to accept the call to serve as pastor of Foothills Lutheran Church. Pastor Prachar then asked that question again, with a different emphasis—what are *you* doing here? He reminded us that it is by grace that pastors serve the Lord; that like all pastors I am a sinner and do not naturally possess the talent or skill to proclaim God’s Law and Gospel. He then misquoted the words of the hymn that we will sing during our distribution this morning, and that misquote has brought much delight to many our members over the years: “Chief of sinners tho’ I be, David Bode’s worse than me!”

There is so much truth in those words. Like Paul, I do know that I am the chief of sinners. I look back over the years of ministry, including the ministry in this congregation, and see just how true that has been. There have been so many times I have failed to do all that God would have me to do. There are the hurts that I have caused to people. I have not always been as faithful in ministering to the needs of the sheep as a good shepherd should do. There have been times when my stubbornness has gotten the better of me; times when anger may have crept in to the things I have said. I’m sure I could go on and would find lots of people agreeing with me. But God, be merciful to me, a sinner! Forgive me, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ for any sins I have committed against you!

It is the realization of my sin which makes it really, really, really good to be here. When you have that realization of your sin, you will know why it is good to be here today. On this Transfiguration Sunday, our loving Saviour invites us to join Him on that mountain top with Peter, James and John. God brings us here to this place, to this mountain to make Himself known to us. We see the glory and majesty of the Lord of Life who calls us to Himself that He may lead us to know His forgiveness, grace and love. He brings us here that we may know all He has done, is doing and will do that we may be forgiven and free. Here, on this mountain, in this church, His glory is best made known in the words He declared to that paralytic whose friends lowered him through a hole in the roof: ***“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*** (Mark 2:5, ESV) They are the loving words that the Saviour spoke to a woman who wept at His feet, wiping them with her hair and kissing them (much to the chagrin of those around Him): ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** (Luke 7:48, ESV) They are the words that He prayed from the cross: ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** (Luke 23:34, ESV) His glory is made known to us as the apostle John declares to all of us: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:8–9, ESV)

My dear people, so loved by God, this is why it really, really, really is good to be here. Our God comes to us! He comes to us with the forgiveness we so desperately need! He comes to cleanse us of all our sins. He comes to bring us hope and peace in the midst of this broken, confused and dark world. He comes to us and reveals His glory in a way that even Peter, James and John did not understand on that mountaintop that day. Yes, they saw the Lord transfigured before them. They saw how ***“the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.”*** (Luke 9:29, ESV) You can almost hear Peter saying, “Finally! This is the glory we want to see in you, Jesus.” Peter was so excited that he wanted to build shelters and stay on the mountain.

But before they ever went up on that mountain, Jesus had told the disciples: ***“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”*** (Luke 9:22, ESV) This is the reason why the Lord of glory left His heavenly kingdom and took into Himself our human flesh and blood. This was God’s plan from the very beginning. We are told that Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus about His impending crucifixion.

They spoke together of God's plan for our salvation – the plan which God made known through Moses and Elijah and the other prophets, and which is now reaching its climax. In a very short time that the glory of the mountaintop would seem to be overshadowed by the suffering and death of our Saviour on the cross. Yet on that cross the glory of the Lord would be revealed in His loving sacrifice for you, for me and for all people. The cross will also give way to the greater glory of Easter morning and the victory of the Lord over sin, death and hell, sealed in the power of His resurrection from the dead! Jesus said: ***“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*** (John 12:32, ESV) His glory only grows as He does all that needs to be done for us and for our salvation. His glory will bring us to glory and to the life with Him that will never end.

This glorious, good news is the reason why it really, really, really is good to be here, as once again the Lord reveals His glory to us. At our circuit meeting this past week, we listened to some interviews with atheists, who bemoan the things happening the world and who see that there are some things that the church has brought to our world that they are missing and even secretly long for in their lives. Consider an interview by psychologist Jordan Peterson with Elon Musk. Musk said: “I’m actually a big believer in the principles of Christianity. I think they’re very good.” “I’m probably a cultural Christian.” Musk then presented an optimistic world view that aimed for greatest happiness both in the present and the future. When asked for more, Musk said: “To deepen our understanding of the nature of the universe—that is my religion for a lack of better way to describe it.” “It’s a religion of curiosity, the religion of greater enlightenment.” (Dr Jordan B Peterson, My conversation with @elonmusk on X, July 22, 2024)

There are so many like Musk—yes, even within the church—who miss what really, really, really matters. They miss the enlightenment which they seek. They miss the glory that the Lord makes known. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, He told them: ***“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”*** (Matthew 13:13, ESV) Thankfully, Jesus does assure His faithful: ***“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”*** (Matthew 13:16, ESV) It really, really, really is good to be here, to see the glory of the Lord. It is good to be here as we hear His Word and rejoice in all it says to us.

Weak, imperfect and sinful man though I am, I have been granted the joy of being able to say: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*** (Romans 1:16, ESV) For the past 14 years, it has been my joy and my privilege to go up on this mountain with you. And it really, really, really is good to be here. It is good to be here where our Lord comes to us with healing, with help, with forgiveness. We do not come because the church is a social club, even though we are blessed to share together in the fellowship of this family in Christ, and know the blessings of that life together under His grace. We do not come to be entertained by music that stirs our emotions, but, as Peter reminds us: ***“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9, NKJV) That is what our rich heritage of hymns do—they praise God. They testify clearly of Him as the One who died and rose for us. We do not come simply to seek the advice of a life-coach, who helps us to have our best life now. No, we come to be drawn away from the world of sin and death. We come to enter into the glory of our God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We come to be enriched through the Word that ***“is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*** (2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV) We come to see ***“Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** (Hebrews 12:2, ESV) We come to be washed in the blood of the Saviour who died for and to be awed by His presence as He comes in the great miracle of grace, giving us His very body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Peter didn't want to leave the mount of Transfiguration. God grant that we don't want to leave this vision of His love, grace and mercy, either. The day is coming when we will see our Saviour in His unveiled glory. We will leave all the sorrow and suffering of this world behind us. Until that day; through all the changing scenes of life, I pray that you will continue to come to this mountain, this church, for it really, really, really is good to be here and to share together in the blessings of the Lord who loves us so richly; who forgives us so graciously, and who blesses us beyond all we can even think or imagine. Amen.