

Matthew 17: 1-9—Transfiguration of Our Lord—February 19th, 2023— Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA—Rev. Timothy W. Sadler, Pastor.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The story of Jesus' Transfiguration is a strange one. Here is this amazing moment of glory thrown into the middle of the disciple's everyday travels. It's clear the disciples were in no way... expecting it, so how could they be prepared to deal with the unfolding scene, there on the mountaintop?

Here is Jesus, the one they eat with, work with and follow—suddenly transformed before their eyes. And as if that isn't enough, two people long gone from this earth appear...right there beside Jesus.

The interesting thing about the Transfiguration in Matthew is that Matthew places this story of blazing light and glory between two very serious conversations about suffering. Right before this mountaintop experience, Jesus tells his disciples he will suffer and die. And right after the mountaintop experience, Jesus again tries to tell them what awaits them in Jerusalem.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent; that time when we make our slow and determined journey to the Cross of Christ. It's no accident that this lesson...about the Transfiguration comes right before.

We've already experienced Jesus' baptism; now we have this Transfiguration. We also know the Resurrection that lies ahead because we are people who stand on this side of Easter.

We know that death isn't the final word about you and me. Because Christ lives, we know that God's final word for us is life. We know this because we have the resurrection of Jesus to show us...what the future holds for us too.

This is precisely what gives us the courage to face what comes in between all this glory. And what comes between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection is ordinary life...life with its ups and downs, with all its highs and lows. Life as Jesus himself experienced it.

But the disciples don't yet have the Resurrection. For them, Jesus' story isn't quite complete. Jesus still has more to say and do; Jesus still has more to suffer. And without the experience...of the cross, the disciples have no way of understanding what's happened on the mountaintop. That's why Jesus commands them not to tell anyone yet. They'll get the meaning of the Transfiguration all wrong.

As Jesus and the disciples leave the mountain, they will be immediately confronted by someone who needs to be healed. The time on the mountain was wonderful, but even Jesus...had to get back to the work of real life and daily living.

Every one of us has had times when we're experienced the presence of God in one way or another. Maybe not as dramatically as Jesus did, but in small ways and in large ways, we've

been graced by God's very presence. And whether we were aware of it or not at the time, we had our spirits uplifted and recharged, because you can't be in the presence of God without somehow being empowered. But then what do you do with the in-between times, those times between our experiences of God? Those times when it seems as though God might have forgotten us and the days...are long and hard. What do you do then?

You do exactly what Jesus did; you get on with life. You take each moment as it comes, knowing God is with you even if you don't feel His presence. You trust and keep going because...that's why we're here.

No one can stay on the mountaintop forever. We'll have to wait until the fullness of Heaven for that. It's only there that we can experience the glory of God 100 percent of the time.

Here on earth, we're called to live in a world where there's suffering and need. And lest we become discouraged, we have to remember that everyone else struggles in the same way.. we all have our in-between times when we find it hard to see the light and love of God, but we have to keep going anyway, because that's what the people of God do.

And just maybe, by our own willingness to trust and persevere, we can offer others hope that their life, even in the hard times, means something too. And then we can offer to accompany them and help them through the difficult parts of the journey, so they learn what it means to keep going in trust. And in their turn, they can be a witness of God's love and hope to others.

One of the truths of this lesson is that by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we carry the light and love of God within us. It isn't like we leave the mountain, and our light begins to fade.

How could it when the true Light of the world lives within us?

I like the part of this story in Matthew when Jesus comes and touches the disciples, and they look-up and see no one but Him.

Isn't that the real reason we like spending time in God's presence, so that we might see only Jesus? And in seeing Jesus, follow Him through the highs and lows of life, trusting that He guides the journey and makes it possible for us to live our in between times with courage and hope.

This is God's beloved Son: listen to Him.

Those are the words on which we can continue to build our lives. These are the words that help us to let go of the past, make sense out of our present circumstances, and give us hope for the future.

On this day, we stand at an in-between time: a time between the beginning of our life here on earth and our resurrection to the life to come. On this day, we are invited to climb mountains.

We're invited to hear God's word for us; we're invited to see no one but Jesus. And then, we are called to follow our Lord into the lives of those around us who need to hear of his love.

Together, we make the glory and light of Jesus a little more real in the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.