

"It's good for us to be here!" That was my thought as my wife and I sat on a beautiful white sand beach in Mexico. It was complete relaxation, free from the fears, troubles, and responsibilities of the real world. The only trouble was we didn't want to come home from our amazing honeymoon getaway! But there was work to do, and life to live. As much as I love being a pastor, being back in my office after a week in paradise was brutal! Experiencing something glorious often makes going back to real life even harder.

Matthew's gospel records how God gave three disciples a glimpse of Jesus' glory. Overwhelmed, Peter exclaimed, **"Lord, it is good for us to be here!"** So good that he didn't want to leave! But, there was work to do, life to live...and death to die. So, the moment ended. God gave his disciples this glimpse of Jesus' glory, not to make going back into the "real world" harder, but to equip them to face the fears of this world by faith. As we celebrate the Transfiguration today, God also gives us a glimpse of Christ's glory **1.) To reinforce our faith and 2.) To remove our fears**, so that we too can say, **"How Good, Lord, to Be Here!"**

It had been a rollercoaster week for the Apostle Peter. He'd experienced the highest high, as he'd so beautifully confessed his faith in Jesus, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** But just a short time later, Peter felt the lowest low.

As Jesus began teaching his disciples that he had to suffer and die, Peter took Jesus aside, and rebuked him like a naughty child, **"Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"** It must have felt like a knife to Peter's heart when Jesus responded, **"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Peter spoke from fear. He didn't want Jesus to suffer and die, nor did he want to suffer and die for following Jesus! A moment of rock-solid faith, and a moment of frailty.

As Jesus' cross grew nearer, he knew Satan would use fear and doubt to try to wrench away his disciples' faith. So Jesus takes three of them: Peter, James, and John, up a mountain to reinforce their faith in him, and remove their fears.

On the mountain, as Jesus was praying, suddenly, **"Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."** Jesus' appearance transformed right before their blinking eyes. Unlike the brightness that had reflected from Moses' face after he left God's glorious presence on Mount Sinai, this divine light emanated from Jesus himself! Not a reflection of divine glory, but actual divine glory, proof of Jesus' divinity!

Before they could process everything, **"There appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."** Why Moses and Elijah? The symbolism is comforting.

As we heard in the first lesson, Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai. His presence points to Christ as the Savior every Old Testament law and regulation foreshadowed; that Christ would keep God's law as the perfect substitute for the whole, imperfect world.

Elijah often represents all of God's Old Testament prophets. Jesus fulfilled everything the prophets, by God's power, had prophesied for centuries about the coming Savior. Two great deliverers of God's people, speaking with the ultimate deliverer, God's Son! This moment reinforced the disciples' faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. As Peter recounts, **"We were eyewitnesses of (Jesus') majesty."** God gives us glimpses of Christ's glory too!

We've never climbed that mountain as eyewitnesses of Jesus' divine glory, but God gives us daily glimpses of Christ's glory to strengthen our faith. Every time you read the Old Testament, or hear the gospels in worship,

you glimpse Christ's glory as the fulfiller of law and prophecy, the glory of God made flesh for us. Every time we witness a child made God's child in baptism, we glimpse God's glory. Every time you receive Jesus' true flesh and blood sacrificed on the cross to forgive your sins, you glimpse God's glory.

It's not bold and flashy like divine radiance and dead prophets on mountaintops, but God allows us to glimpse Christ's glory through Word, sacrament, and worship! And the Spirit works through those means of grace to strengthen our faith in Jesus.

It's not just a fleeting glimpse that requires mountain climbing. It's a daily privilege as simple as opening a Bible or walking into church, that equips us to go "down the mountain" with a strengthened faith to face the fears of this world trusting in Jesus! How good, Lord, to be here!

As was his custom, Peter spoke before thinking. ***"If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*** Once again, the fear in Peter's heart flowed from his lips. He didn't want to leave that glorious mountain, because he feared what would happen after they left. If they stayed there in glory, maybe they could avoid the suffering and death Jesus predicted!

But, they couldn't stay on that mountain, because there was work to be done, lives to live, and death to die. Without the cross, there could be no eternal glory for anyone.

We can scoff at Peter's fearful, "speak before thinking" attitude, but when Jesus tells us ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me,"*** do we fearlessly take up our crosses and trust God to take care of us? Or does our fear lead us to flee the cross and cling to comfortable, "glorious" things? "Crosses" aren't just wooden torture devices. Crosses are any persecution or difficulties we face because we're Christians.

Kind of like how children hug security blankets or stuffed animals when they're afraid, fear leads us to cling tightly to things in our lives: money, relationships, health, pleasure, glory—thinking that those will help drive away our fear. But they can't. No matter how tightly we cling to earthly glory, it can't get rid of those nagging fears that keep us up at night. That question that always lurks in the back of your mind, "What if this stuff fails me?" Satan wields fear like a sword, hoping to sever your trust that Jesus will take care of you, and even bless you through difficulties.

That's why God the Father interrupts Peter before he even finishes his fear-driven building plans. ***"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"***

As sinners in the presence of God's holiness, the terrified disciples throw themselves face-first into the dirt. Maybe there have been times when your worries, fears, or guilt over sin has literally or figuratively driven you to the ground, covering your head in fear over your failures and troubles. But God doesn't leave us cowering. As the disciples shook with terror, Jesus came, and laid not a punishing whip on their backs... but a loving, compassionate hand. ***"Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."***

"Don't be afraid," can either be an empty sentiment, or a life changing comfort, depending on who tells you "don't be afraid." If there's a huge buffalo charging toward me, and the guy standing next to me with a nerf gun says, "Don't be afraid," I'm still going to be afraid! But if the guy standing next to me is an Olympic sharpshooter with a high-powered rifle, him saying, "Don't be afraid," comforts me. Our fears are removed when someone with the ability to solve the problem says, "don't be afraid."

When the disciples looked up, all the things that made them afraid were gone, and all they saw was Jesus. Transfiguration removes our fears when we just focus on Jesus! Because the one who tells us “don’t be afraid,” is the all-powerful God who controls everything, especially those things that fill us with fear! Because the one who tells us “don’t be afraid” willingly set aside the full use of his divine power and glory in order to win salvation for us and show us his love! If he loves us that much, won’t he certainly guide our lives according to his perfect will?

Transfiguration makes it possible for us to say at the top of the mountain and at the bottom, “It’s good, Lord, to be here!” Because our glimpses of Jesus’ glory remind us that our Savior is God—who puts a loving, compassionate hand on our quaking shoulders and reassures us, “Don’t be afraid.”

Transfiguration changed the lives of these three disciples. These same men whose fear would lead them to flee from the cross, abandon or deny Jesus, would one day willingly suffer or die for him. Peter was crucified upside down. James was beheaded—the first martyred disciple. John would live out his life in exile. Why were they able to face these crosses for Jesus with joy and faith? Because on that mountain, God himself told them, “Don’t be afraid.” Because they knew that through Jesus suffering and death, they had Heaven, and there they’d stand fearlessly in the complete, perfect glory of their Savior. God promises the same to us!

Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone what they’d seen, ***“until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”*** The time wasn’t right yet, but after the resurrection, they were to tell everyone! God allowed these three disciples to witness Christ’s glory, so they could tell others! That’s why we can celebrate Transfiguration today. Because they shared it with others.

We have so many people in our lives who are consumed by fear. Your hairstylist pours out her heart to you. Your friend always seems frazzled. Your sibling calls you crying because life is just too much. What can you do? What can you say?

Tell them about Christ, who removes all of our fears in life and eternity! God wants you to share the good news. And to help encourage you, a month from today, we’re holding a Festival of Friendship weekend. Our encouragement and challenge to each member, adult or child, is to “Find Your One.” That means we want each of you to invite at least one person to come to that special service with you. Your hairdresser, your friend, your sibling—so the removal of fear that comes from knowing Jesus can be theirs too. So they can say with all of us, as we glimpse Christ’s glory, “It’s good Lord to be here.”