**Matthew 17:1-9 (ESV)**

[1] And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, 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 white as light. [3] And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. [4] And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." [5] He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." [6] When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. [7] But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." [8] And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [9] And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

**“The Last Word”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. We really do live in an isolated world. Mankind cannot see beyond the realm of raw science. It is our new form of slavery sentencing us to ignore or finally deny anything that God says. However, celebrating the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus pulls us out of the slavery of numbers and theories. The purpose of today’s mountain top experience would be in God’s Son taking men beyond worldly standards and concerns. The realms of creation uncovered the presence of the Creator. Peter, James, and John were caught in the middle of heaven and earth and there was Jesus.

Such an experience with this radiance of God was not unique to the New Testament. God was there with Adam and Eve walking in the Garden after the Fall. He was there with Moses and the elders on top of Mount Sinai. His presence came on Mount Carmel consuming the watery altar of Elijah. Even after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, St. John the Apostle many years later would write in the book of Revelation,

“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow.” (Rev. 1:12-14a)

Most would scoff at these and other episodes of Holy Scripture. The freedom of man does not listen to the faithfulness of God’s Word. Thankfully, after all is said and done, Jesus has the last word to deliver us from all that we fear.

What a privilege it was for Peter, James, and John to go up the mountain with Jesus. His invitation took them along for an experience they would not soon forget. As like in any intense event, things were happening quickly and one thing just lead to another. The shining light radiating out from Jesus surprisingly separated Him from His disciples. Peter made the confession a week earlier, “You are the Christ the Son of the living God,” but now He could see the full meaning of those words. At about the same time, prophets long passed now appeared seeing Moses and Elijah. These saints of old were talking with Jesus. He was to fulfill the promise of God’s presence as savior. Of course, Peter decided to chime in wanting more than a taste of this glory, but to remain in it. He had no clue what he was saying as he would soon find out.

There are many famous last words we say as well. It is to forget the big picture saying things like “I saw this done on TV.” Or maybe, “I can do that with my eyes closed.” Or how about, “I can make this light before it changes.” If we say risky things in our life, what do we say before the presence of God? The transfiguration is to cheer our hearts, but also is to teach us to trust in Christ. God’s Son has covered our lives with His glory. Through water and the word, all of heaven is opened up. Baptism is how Jesus brings us with him to stand before His Father in heaven and all the saints. This is an adoption by grace as a gift. It is why we can make the sign of the cross entering the Divine Service, because it is God’s service to us. Like Peter, James, and John we now hear the Word of the apostles and stand in the presence of God by the Sacrament. Yet, just like Peter, we chime in with our two cents wanting to add to the glory of it all.

The text uncovers a great mystery among our many words today stating, “Peter was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.” This drastic interruption by God the Father overpowered Peter’s words. How quickly did they forget that sinful men are sinful men. The glorious experience all of a sudden went straight to their heart. It was a similar event as described by the prophet Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). The disciples recognized the voice of the Father and saw the cloud, but more fearful was the fact they saw the face of God in Jesus. He was the Son distinctly separate from any prophet and equal to the Father. Oh yes, God spoke in the Old Testament, but now Jesus’ words were life and death. He proclaimed repentance and faith in Him. It meant no other Word was greater than His Word.

God the Father interrupts us with His holiness. None has a right to stand in the presence of God and live. None has a right to live as if God is not present in their life. We can try to ignore it like the world until all we have left is to cry out, “where is God?” We can try to change the picture as some churches, but that only pushes Jesus farther away from being the Savior. Everyone knows the Law of God or at least the Law written on the heart. As the Psalmist declared, “The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” Yet, the greater question more than truth of the Law over us is how God’s Son is with us. After the transfiguration, this mighty glory would go away into the cross. God wants us to be well prepared to believe in what His Son says and to fear His holy Name. As our Lutheran Fathers declare of Christ, “He knows very well what and how he must speak, and he is able mightily to accomplish and achieve what he speaks and promises…” (Tappert 577:43). Only Jesus will release us from our fears both of heaven’s glory and earths pain so salvation rest alone by faith in Him.

What are the first words that God’s Son says to His fearful disciples? "Rise, and have no fear." Such words also came with a personal touch. What absolution by the Savior to those who had nothing to say as sinners. What love was present to touch their unholy lives with His holiness. The Gospel also brings the gift to see things apart from the fears we have. The text tells us, “And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.” The Father gives the glory to His Son because He is the Savior. This is how the Holy God of heaven is able to have love for us unholy people on earth. No wonder when we are at worship the Divine Service can be both enjoyable and fearful. God is having His way with us by His Word. We are not trying to create the experience but Jesus is speaking it by His absolution. He is displaying the truth and love by His presence at the Lord’s Supper. All we finally hear and see then in worship is Jesus. He comes to be both Sacrifice and servant. As we begin Lent on Wednesday, the path darkens toward Holy Week. All we will have left by Good Friday is Jesus’ Word beaten and bloody on the cross. The Father says “listen to Him.” It can be for Lent or for our whole life. No one else will raise us from the dead. No one else can tell sinners have no fear. No one else will give us His glory by grace. Thankfully, after all is said and done, Jesus has the last word to deliver us. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.