

Transfiguration, 2021, **Sermon** (Mk 9:2-9; Ps 50:1-6; 2 Cor 4:3-6)

The holy gospel according to Mark, the 9th chapter.

[Six days after Jesus first told his disciples that he—the Son of Man—would suffer and be killed and after three days rise again], **he took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)**

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. [Remember the “Messianic secret” from last week?]

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Picture this: search lights. *Strobe* lights! It’s a scene that’ll never be repeated—so rare it’s not even once-in-a-lifetime. Jesus is illuminated from the inside out, on fire with the glory of God. White, dazzling white, *glowing white*—whiter than any white you’ve ever seen.

He’s on top of a mountain, where he led his faithful disciples Peter, James, and John. And he’s not alone! He’s standing there, gleaming, between the two Old Testament heroes of the faith: Moses and Elijah. It’s enough to take your breath away. It might even blow your mind!

It seems to have blown *Peter’s* mind. Just six days ago Jesus asked his disciples, **“Who do you say that I am?”** and Peter replied, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of God.”** This is the Peter on whom Jesus built his church. But immediately after that, this same Peter was told, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** because he wasn’t willing to have Jesus die.

Peter the impetuous. Peter the impulsive. Peter, whose mind was blown away by the transfiguration of his best friend, his teacher, his Savior. Poor Peter. Mark tells us, **“They were so frightened, he didn’t know what to say.”**

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Poor Peter, I said. You know the proverb: *It's better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt.* Well, Peter didn't know that saying. And he spoke up: **Teacher, it's a good thing we're here! Let's put up three shelters, one for each of you!**

Did he want to preserve that moment? Keep all of holy history in one place? There they were: Moses, the giver of the Law. Elijah, the first and foremost of the prophets. And the Messiah, long promised by God to deliver his chosen people from a bondage worse than the slavery in Egypt—bondage, they thought, to the Roman oppressors. But, in truth, bondage to sin and death.

Then came the voice from the cloud: **"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"** The words remind us of the voice from heaven when Jesus rose from the baptismal waters of the Jordan: **"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased."**

Listen to him, God said. We've been listening to Mark's Jesus since the beginning of Advent. His first words in the gospel set the tone for the rest: **"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent, and believe the good news."**

Hear again some of the other words we have from Jesus' lips—these are easy to spot if you have a red-letter Bible.

To his first disciples he said, **"Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."** To the evil spirit that plagued a Jewish man, his words were, **"Be quiet! Come out of him!"** When his disciples told him everyone was looking for him, he replied, **"Let's go somewhere else. . . . so I can preach there also. That's why I have come."**

Those were all in the first chapter of Mark. Today's text has skipped ahead to chapter 9. In between, Jesus has spoken many other things to his disciples, and the crowds, and the scribes and Pharisees.

Today's words are different, though. They're not spoken by Jesus, but by God himself! **"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"**

We have the advantage over Peter, James, and John. They're only at the beginning of the story, and we know the end. We know what lies ahead in our Lenten worship, culminating in Holy Week with the betrayal of Judas, the arrest of Jesus, the mock trial and the mockery of the soldiers.

We'll follow Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to Calvary, the hill outside Jerusalem where he'll be hung on a cross between two thieves. From there his body will be taken to a borrowed tomb in another garden.

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" says the voice from the cloud. ***Listen to him when he tells you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him. Listen to him when he says we must be last in order to become first.***

Listen to him when he tells his disciples how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God—and remember that he also says, **"all things are possible with God."**

Listen to him when he says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . and love your neighbor as yourself."

The Transfiguration of Jesus reveals *his* glory in the glory of God at the mid-point of his ministry. When he leaves the mountaintop, he heads steadfastly towards Jerusalem, knowing full well that he will die there. His purpose in dying is to bring all people to God.

Jesus descended from heaven, God-in-the-flesh, so we might ascend to eternal life when our course on earth is finished. He ascended the mountaintop with his disciples to help them bridge the gap between dazzling glory and limited earthly existence; and for the rest of his life he'll be teaching them what it means to be fishers of people who are also beloved of God.

Jesus invites us to ascend with him to the mountaintop. There we can see clearly what the valley below is like—and we remember his words about remembering the last, the least, the little, the lonely, and the lost—about loving our neighbors as ourselves.

When *we* are transfigured by Jesus—both his glory and his suffering love—we can *become* Jesus to those we meet. The only way the world will ever be transfigured is one life at a time, touched and blessed by those of us who've already been touched and blessed.

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" intones the voice from heaven. ***Listen to him as he says, "This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sin. Take and eat; take and drink."***

Thanks be to God!