

Transfiguration 2011

Matt. 17:1-9 “Holy Mountain – Brilliant Light”

If you have flown up the Pacific coast on a clear day you have see this part of the country from the perspective of 30,000 feet. The world looks much different from that far up. The lay of the land is spread out before you, the vast open country, the course of mighty rivers. From 30,000 feet you can chart the breadth of mountain ranges. Coming into SeaTac, Mt. Rainer dominates the landscape and the highways cutting through the mountains are like threads which twist and wind their way through canyons and forests. From an airplane the world seems large and humans very small. Even our large cities cover only a tiny fraction of the countryside. Yet when you land and walk into the airport it seems that the city closes in on you and the traffic and the congestion once again cloud your vision of what the world looks like from 30,000 feet. Which perspective is real? The one from 30,000 feet up or the one from your car as you grind your way through city traffic?

Well I suppose both are real. The difference is that we live most of our lives out at sea level and not at 30,000 feet. And so we tend to think that the world is really just this maze we call everyday life that we struggle to figure out. So we plod along through the twists and turns of the road of life without seeing what lies around the next bend or over the mountain which stands in our way. And in doing so we tend to become overly concerned with the things close at hand and we tend to lose sight of the big picture of life. A parking ticket ruins your day. A disagreement with your spouse and you find yourself contemplating divorce. A blip in the economy and the sky is falling. What we need to do is step back and look at life from a different perspective.

Perhaps people who get depressed with the winter rain and clouds would be well served to spend a few hundred bucks on an airplane ride instead of a therapist to get a different perspective. How you see things determines much of the joy you experience in life. If you see your life as an endless succession of day-after-day boring sameness then life will have little vigor and excitement. But, if you see each day of your life as another gift from God, to use to His glory and for the good of your neighbor, then life will take on new meaning and excitement. It depends on your perspective.

While the disciples of Jesus didn't have airplanes to rise above the landscape in order to get a different perspective they did have mountains to climb. And climb one they did one day, following Jesus. And on that mountain the disciples were given a vision that changed their perspective on life. They saw Jesus in a totally different light.

Peter, James and John climbed into the rare air of the mountain, there to see Jesus radically changed before their eyes. His appearance became dazzling white and his face shown like the sun. Then Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. And the voice of God came from the clouds saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." The veil was drawn back and they saw the true identity of Jesus in all his heavenly glory and power.

That would be enough to make any person stop and pay attention. We can not fault Peter for wanting to lock in this experience by building a shrine, and then stay there awhile to enjoy this glorious epiphany, this mountain-top experience. But Jesus led the disciples back down the mountain.

Is Jesus opposed to our having a vision of glory? No. We are blessed if we remember the power of God in Jesus. But Jesus also led the disciples down the mountain and into the valley, into the rat race of everyday life. And there Jesus demonstrated to his disciples and to us, what it means to live in expectation of the coming kingdom of God.

To live in the valley, with a vision of the glory to come, gives us hope and courage and joy and a different perspective on life.

We have hope because Jesus has gone before us into death and has risen from the dead.

We have courage because Jesus holds us and our future in his powerful hand.

We have inextinguishable joy in a world where sorrows lie close at hand.

We have a different perspective of the world by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Not that everything Xians run into in life will be easy. Jesus taught his disciples that the road of discipleship, down in the valley, leads to a cross.

The seasons of the church year and the texts appointed for each Sunday give us encouragement for what we will face in life. And so the season of Epiphany and Transfiguration come just before Lent. Why? Because we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we face the inevitable troubles of life and our own death. And so the Transfiguration stands at the beginning of Lent to give us a vision that will encourage us as we walk through the valleys of life.

The psalmist says, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." C.S. Lewis wrote a book and titled it "Shadow Lands". That's a good description of life in this world. The shadows of

disappointment, sorrow, sickness and loss are common to life. But remember, the sun still shines above the clouds of life. And the sun shines the brightest at the top of a mountain. In the Transfiguration, Jesus was seen for who he truly was, i.e. the Son of God. The disciples remembered this awesome event and said of Jesus, “his face shown like the sun”.

11:00 (SunShine Mountain Preschool is a place designed to point to Jesus as the Light of the World. You parents who bring your children to SSMtn. are placing your precious child in that light. God’s Holy Spirit works to instill faith in your child in this place. SunShine Mountain is a place where the light of Jesus shines. This is the greatest gift your child will ever receive. It is the gift of life, both for living in this world and for the life to come.)

From the Mt. of Transfiguration Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He went down from the mountain to face death on a cross. He went to the cross for you and for your salvation. Jesus went to the cross and into the grave in order that his brilliant light might penetrate the darkness of death and shatter its power. And Jesus promises to call you out of the shadows of this world and the darkness of death so that you might live in the sunshine of his love forever. Thanks be to God. AMEN