

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Transfiguration Sunday

February 14, 2021

Psalm 50:1–6 (ESV):

1 The Mighty One, God the LORD,

speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.

3 Our God comes; he does not keep silence;
before him is a devouring fire,
around him a mighty tempest.

4 He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

5 “Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

6 The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge! Selah

First Reading: 2 Kings 2:1–12; Exodus 34:29–35 (ESV):

Elijah Taken to Heaven

2 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. 3 And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

4 Elijah said to him, “Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." 11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Exodus 34:29–35 (ESV):

The Shining Face of Moses

29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

34 Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, 35 the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 3:12–13 (ESV):

12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, 13 not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 9:2–9 (ESV):

The Transfiguration

2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

9 And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sermon 7 – Transfiguration Sunday

“Sinless, Radiant”

Mark 9:2-9

Dear friends,

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so they say, but some things are both timeless and universal, and Jesus demonstrates this in our Gospel lesson for today. This is a pivot point in the Gospels, typically, the transfiguration of our Lord, showing that Jesus has turned His face toward Jerusalem and is getting ready for the mainstage act of the crucifixion. Jesus has a lot to do, and He attends to it in rapid-fire fashion in Mark, but now Jesus is like a cruise missile. He has His target and He's not going to stop until He hits

His target. But why this? Why the show? What did it teach the disciples? What does it teach us?

This comes after Peter's confession, that great proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and I doubt that this is an accident. Mark wants these words in our mind as we hear this. If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, as Peter has so eloquently said, what does that mean? Is He, or is He not? If He is, what is here to do? We know the answers to all these questions, but a little marinating in those answers is never amiss for Christians who are emphatically *not* the Christ but who would desperately like to be because at least then we would have some control over our life.

To be the Christ, the son of the living God, is to suffer. It is to suffer the sins of the world, all mankind, to suffer the ways that sin breaks the world. God created this world in a kind of harmony that seems to defy logical possibility, we probably wouldn't recognize a perfect world, because we're so used to compensating for sin. Jesus had to starve, work His butt off, get cheated, probably lose His earthly father Joseph. He had to endure all sorts of things that just seem like life to us, but to Him would've been unacceptable beyond belief. God didn't create this world with sin, and He didn't create His people to die. We did that. Jesus suffers all facets of this, losing, struggling, until He is eventually falsely accused, tortured, and murdered in a way that strikes us as particularly cruel and painful. I talk about these ugly facets a lot because the ugliness of Jesus is very important to me, because it is our ugliness. It is our sin that He suffers, not His own. As I said, we're so used to sin that it becomes easy to gloss over, to ignore. Never ignore that no holy God should ever have to take things that Jesus took. For you and I, He bled. For you and I, He died. For you and I, He just scraped by with the bills. For you and I, He worked in all the places that we work. He did it perfectly, He did us perfectly, and we are not perfect.

But that is not all that being the Christ, the Son of the Living God, means. God isn't just our sin, as weird as that sounds to say, and the Transfiguration is a brief glimpse into how this is so. For reasons unknown, Jesus only takes three disciples with Him, Peter,

James, and John. These are the brain trust of the bunch, the leaders, the ones who will drive the church forward into what it will become. **“And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.”** To put it in mild language, this is also what it means to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is not just the dirt and labor, it is not just the bills and the family, it is not just the sin and the suffering, the death and the decay. It is also glory, shining light, something so indescribably beautiful that not a single Gospel writer manages to find the human words to capture it. It is also power, control, dominion, over not just light, not just fabric, not just this earth, but time and the whole species as well. Why say that? Because Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus. Moses and Elijah are not just dead they are really dead, extra dead, and yet they appear with Jesus whole and living, hundreds of years after their passing.

This is also who Jesus is. He is not an accident or a coincidence. He is the Son of God, with all that means, the dirt and the shine, the labor and the rest, the sin and the glory, the death and the life. Jesus manages, within Himself, to summarize the entirety of the Christian experience in one simple transformation. What you are seeing, dear saints, is your future. Your destiny. Your destination. This is you. Shining. Beautiful. Free from death, free from the limitations of time, talking with those who are likewise freed from these things. This is the fate Jesus has written for you. This the eternity that waits for you. No sin, no worry, nothing other than the holiness that Jesus has won for you. That is beauty. That is majesty. That is the power of forgiveness.

We all know how forgiveness restores relationships. We know we can forgive each other and it allows us to go forward with a new start. We know God forgives us the wrongs we do. But look to the transfiguration and see that God's forgiveness goes beyond the status of your relationship. It goes into the very essence of your flesh. God's forgiveness transfigures you. This is how God sees you! Shining bright with His love. He does not see the sins you regret. He does not see you as you have broken yourself to be. This is how He sees you, in your body, right now, and what God sees He makes real, what God says happens, and when God says, I forgive you all your sins, this is what you become.

Jesus shows this to the disciples because they are about to see the worst of the dirt. John is about to see this Son of God bleed and die, Peter and James won't because they succumb to their own cowardice and run from the scene, and they will have to face the awful truth that for all their chest-beating courage, for all their status among the disciples, for all that Jesus trusted them, they let Him down at the time when it was time to step up. They confront the reality of sin in this world and in themselves, and it is for this that Jesus shows them what is to come. Jesus shows them who is, and by showing them who He is, Jesus shows them who they are.

I wrote this to do the same to you. You have seen much this past year. You have heard a great deal of foolishness and watched an enormous amount of pulsing rage find its expression in often depraved and unbelieving ways. You have watched things you love torn down, ripped up, as if they meant nothing. You have watched ignorant children behave like animals rather than men, filled with the knowledge that they know not what they do. You have seen the dirt, the labor, the ugliness, just as the disciples had to do. It's hard to beam that stuff into your ears and eyeballs all day long without it starting to fill you up, and I know plenty of you turned away in disgust rather than continue. Look to this transfiguration. Look at our Lord here. Listen to those words about His purity, His beauty, His singularity. Feel the power of a disciplined mind, see a God not bound by any of this, a God not beyond it, but a God who went into sin to lift you beyond it. This is your God.

He is a man who does not lose His temper. He does not make rash decisions. He does not lie, He does not die, even when He dies He doesn't die. He doesn't walk away in disgust. Instead, He listens. He cares. He loves. He understands. He makes you like Him, free from sin, free from death, free from ignorance and fear. He is truth. He is justice. He is righteousness. He is everything you cannot see in your world today, He is everything you cannot see in the mirror.

He isn't just these things, He is the conduit and giver of those things. He is the worker of those things. He makes them happen. He makes them happen in you with words, I forgive you all your sins. He makes them happen in the world through the good people that are still in the world, woven in the midst of all that awful. This is your God. He is beauty. He is truth. He gives you beauty and truth in His words, in His body and blood. It just looks like wafers and wine. It just sounds like more words. Tune your faith to your future, though, and you will see what I have told you. This is your future. This world is a ghetto, not a home. Jesus shines, and He shines not for Himself but for you, to show you how you will shine, come what may.

Amen.