

## Transfiguration / February 19, 2023

### 2 Peter 1:16-21

**“And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.”**

Transfiguration is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means to see in a different light. The three disciples see Jesus in a new light; not simply as a son of man, but as the Son of God. They heard Jesus speak many times and wondered at the power of His words. Now they know the source. They hear the divine voice affirm His divinity and the divine power of His words, saying, “This is my beloved Son...Listen to Him.” On the Sunday of the Transfiguration, we hear the good news of Jesus. He has the words of eternal life. He is the source of eternal life for all who hear Him, take His words to heart and believe.

The word transfigure means to change the appearance of something. Jesus’ appearance was altered, so the disciples saw something which was otherwise hidden from human sight. The three disciples see Jesus’ divinity shining through the cloak of His humanity. They no longer see Jesus simply as their teacher. They see He is the eternal Son of God. The vision came suddenly and quickly passed away, but from that point on the disciples saw Jesus and listened to His words in a different way. Jesus reveals Himself to us through His word. In His word He shows Himself to us as our God and Saviour.

Peter, James and John had a marvelous experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Jesus’ glory with their eyes and heard the divine voice with their ears. It was a theophany, a visible appearance of God in His glory. But its important to realize that the theophany wasn’t an end in itself. It led the disciples to the word. The divine voice affirmed Jesus’ divinity and the priority of the word saying, “Listen to Him.” Three people were privileged to see Jesus’ glory, but we are all blessed with the word. Jesus reveals His glory to us as often as we open our eyes to read and open our ears to listen to the prophetic word. The disciple Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples the evening of His resurrection. The others told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas would not believe their words until he had the same experience. When He had the experience, Jesus chastised him, asking, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” He said, “Blessed are those who have not seen but have believed.” Seeing is not believing. Believing is seeing. We believe because we see Jesus in His word.

It is important to note that in our text Peter, writing later in life, leads us to believe not on the basis of his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. He calls us to faith on the basis of the prophetic word. People had been saying that Peter and the others made up the story of the transfiguration, as well as other experiences with Jesus; calling them “cleverly devised myths.” That’s the trouble with a personal experience, it may speak powerfully to you, but it won’t have the same value to others, who did not have the same experience.

Peter affirms their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. They did not make it up. It really happened. Nevertheless, he refers us to the words of scripture as the most certain basis of the veracity of their experience and the truth of our faith in Christ Jesus. No matter what experiences we may or may not have, we have the truth of God’s word. God’s word is truth. The scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit are God’s word. God’s word leads us to Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our salvation. St. John said, “These are written so you may believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, that believing you may have life in His name.”

Peter, James and John had an experience that testified to Jesus’ divinity and affirmed the truth of the prophetic word. What would you do if you had an experience that contradicted the prophetic word? How would you respond, if a powerful spiritual being presented itself to you, spoke words that contradicted the gospel of salvation by grace received through faith in Christ Jesus and led you away from Jesus’ work on the cross to your own works for salvation? I say this because important people from within Christendom have had such experiences, departed from the faith and led others to turn from Christ. In every experience of life, we need to remember the word is not understood through the experience. The experience must always be understood through the word.

The night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed for the Church, saying, “Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.” God would never give us a spiritual experience that contradicts His word or leads us away from Christ and the sacrifice of His cross. No matter what spiritual experiences we have, no matter what experiences we have in life, we have the truth of God’s word as the firm foundation of our faith. We have the prophetic word as a lamp shining in a dark place to discern truth from falsehood. The words of Moses and the Prophets testify to Jesus and show Him to be our God and Saviour.

Experiences that come from God lead us deeper into His word. Experiences that lead us away from Christ come from the world, the devil and our own sinful nature. God speaks to us in these experiences through His word to encourage us in faith and to draw us closer to His heart. We have something more certain than any experience in life, be it good or bad. We have the prophetic word, to which Peter says we do well to pay attention as a lamp shining in a dark place. The Psalmist sang, "Your word O Lord is a light to my feet and a lamp to my path." The word leads us to Jesus. He is the Light of the world. He speaks words of forgiveness and life.

Humans may speak God's word, but God's word is different than human words. God's word has power to accomplish what it speaks. God's word is contrary to the words of the world and foolishness according to the wisdom of the world. A comedian offered proof that Darwin was wrong, held up a bible and mockingly said, "It's in this dusty old book, called the bible." There are times when we all doubt God's word. But one day he and all of us will be dust, but God's word will remain. Isaiah sang, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." God's word has remained throughout the ages. In those ages it has given faith, comfort and hope to millions and millions of children, men and women, who opened their ears to hear, whose hearts the Holy Spirit opened to believe.

God's word remains, because it was not produced by the will of men, or expresses the thoughts of humans. God's word is inspired by the Holy Spirit and expresses His thoughts which are above, beyond and even foolishness to the human mind. The word leads us to Jesus, who shared in our humanity, suffered and died on the cross to pay the debt of human sin, so that all who believe in Him may not perish eternally, but have eternal life.

Two famous men appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah. Their presence testified that Jesus is the fulfillment of their words, that the words of scripture lead us to Jesus and find fulfillment in Him and His cross. From the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. There He fulfilled the words of Moses and the prophets, by offering Himself as the sacrifice of atonement for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. The scriptures lead us to Jesus' cross. In the cross we see Him as more than our teacher. In the cross we see Him as our Saviour. On the cross, Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify all who believe in Him as God's Son and who hold Him in their hearts as Saviour. God bless us to pay attention the prophetic word, hold Jesus in our hearts as Saviour, until we see His glory with our own eyes in His resurrection. In His name. Amen