

Transfiguration

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Date: 06 August 2017

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, last night, after my sermon for this morning was already finished, I saw online that a friend of mine had posted an article about how we often preach the transfiguration wrong.

Now, I started to sweat a little bit when I saw that headline, because my sermon, as I said, was already finished. But I looked, and I think that I escaped the trap that they talked about.

One of those, of course, if you've been in a liturgical church for any length of time, you've probably heard a sermon on the transfiguration about the goofy thing that Peter says.

Anyone ever hear that? Yeah, well, the goofy things that Peter says, of course, aren't the gospel, so that seems like a really strange focus for us. Certainly, the goofy things that I often say aren't the gospel either.

[1:30] I wouldn't want anyone making a sermon out of that. The Feast of the Transfiguration, I think, is one of those days in the church calendar that doesn't always get its due from us.

Now, part of that, I think, is that it has never been co-opted by the culture. You know, everyone loves Christmas, right? We love the presents, we love the Christmas tree, we love Santa Claus, we love the reindeer.

All that stuff. And everyone loves Easter. They love the bunnies and they love the candy. But the reality, of course, is that there is no transfiguration bunny. So transfiguration probably isn't getting as much love for that reason.

But another factor is probably that unlike, say, Easter or even Pentecost, the transfiguration doesn't always fall on a Sunday. This year it does, but that is not always the case.

How many of you have the practice of going to church every year on the Feast of the Transfiguration? Anyone? Yeah, me neither. So, that introduction being said, I just want to say also that I think that the transfiguration is a little tougher for us to wrap our minds around than a lot of other holy days.

[2:42] We understand Christmas. Jesus is born. We understand Easter. Jesus rises from the dead. We understand Pentecost. The Spirit descends. But what about the transfiguration?

Jesus is transfigured. A word that we don't use a whole lot, do we? He shines with the glory of God. His disciples see it and seem to find the experience overwhelming. Now, what does that say to us? The message isn't quite as obvious, is it? But the transfiguration is important. It tells us something amazing about who Jesus is.

It shows us something amazing. The glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. The disciples get a glimpse of Jesus beyond what their eyes could ordinarily see.

And as we read the passage, we do too. It's a view that we don't always recognize in the same way when we look at the baby in the manger.

[3:41] It's a view that we don't always recognize in the same way when we look at that figure hanging on the cross. It's a view of Jesus as He is in all His majesty, in His glory.

It tells us that Jesus is more than our eyes can ordinarily see. It tells us that Jesus is more than a man, though of course He is that.

It tells us that Jesus is more than a good moral example, though He is that as well.

It tells us that Jesus, without ceasing to be man, is the incarnate God, who shines with the glory that was His from all eternity and will be His forever.

We see that this Jesus is the light of the world, and that we are called to bow down in awe before His majesty and worship Him.

[4:44] So, this story points us to Jesus in a vivid way, but lest we be tempted to think that this is a myth, that it's an invented story just intended to illustrate a point, it's confirmed to us in our epistle from 2 Peter that these things actually happened.

There we read, We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to Him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. So, we're not dealing with mere myth.

We're not dealing with literary devices. We're talking about history. The account of the transfiguration is historical. What Jesus did and said is historical reality.

[6:00] Now, why am I raising this point? First, because we see it in our passage from 2 Peter for this morning, but also because it's important for us to remember it, this claim of the historicity of what Jesus said and did, against the claims in our own day that we as Christians follow myths and fables.

I remember taking a required Bible course in my fairly liberal university as an undergraduate. That was an adventure. The teacher approached the material from a secular mindset, so she made the argument one day that it doesn't really matter if the historical events in the Bible, like the event that we remember this morning, doesn't matter if those things actually happened historically.

Her idea was that they happened in the history of faith. So, that's why it matters. Now, in the foolishness of youth, I decided I was going to argue with my professor.

I made the point that actually, no, it really does matter. One of our central claims as Christians is that God has acted in human history. It's happened to act in human history.

That's pretty big. To save his people. Of course it matters. It matters a lot. For goodness sake, I've seen interviews and talks with people in clerical college saying that the resurrection of Jesus doesn't really matter either.

[7:37] It's just a symbol. But it all matters. And the transfiguration matters because it reminds us of the amazing, saving reality of the incarnation.

That God has acted definitively in history to save us. To save us by becoming a human being, by entering into human history, to set us free from sin, death, and the devil by his death and resurrection.

I would say that matters quite a lot. What about you? Because let's be real. Nothing short of our crucified and risen Savior, who is both God and man, can save us from our sins and give us eternal life.

The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus, as the God-man, is able to be and is our Savior. The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus shines with the glory and majesty of God.

That He is God with us. That He is the Father's beloved and only Son. And doesn't that mean everything? It matters. The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus is the Lord.

[8:53] The transfiguration reminds us to get it right when we talk about, think about, and believe in Jesus. Because so much of the world that we live in gets Jesus wrong, and sometimes we do too.

A lot of people in our world express admiration for Jesus, but get it majorly wrong on the topic of who He actually is.

So from one perspective, maybe Jesus was a really good guy.

You've probably encountered this one. He shook hands and kissed babies. He told everyone to be nice to each other. The basic narrative is that Jesus ran afoul of the people who weren't nice, who got so mad about Him telling people to be nice that they killed Him.

Ever hear anyone talk about that, Jesus? He's pretty popular in 21st century America, I would say. Or what about the vision of Jesus, and I think this is related, as the good human teacher?

[10:02] He gives us a good program for navigating life. He tells us how to live in a meaningful way. He tells us how to be spiritual, whatever people who say that mean by that.

Jesus is a good teacher. Now this model does get part of it right, but it doesn't go far enough. It doesn't tell us that He is the greatest teacher. It doesn't tell us that He is the one who speaks with the very authority of God.

This model, of course, has to overlook or try to explain away Jesus' claims to be God. And it has to overlook or try to explain away Jesus' teaching about salvation through faith in His name, about the power of His death and resurrection.

It has to try to explain those away, but as C.S. Lewis once put it in his famous argument, Jesus is either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

The mere human teacher isn't an option. A good human teacher doesn't go around claiming divinity for himself and proclaiming himself as the Savior of the world, unless he is God.

[11:13] Now here's another image of Jesus that we encounter sometimes. Jesus as the political revolutionary. You encounter that, Jesus? Now that's a really popular one in our day and time.

In this model, they think that Jesus' mission was to try to overturn the unjust political structures of His day, maybe to overthrow the occupying Romans. And I kid you not, just the other day, I was talking with someone who would seem to see Jesus as a kind of communist rebel.

Now in response to that, I made the point, what kind of political revolutionary tells people to pay their taxes? But the transfiguration reminds us, no, Jesus is more than all these things.

It reminds us that Jesus is the light. It reminds us of the glory of Jesus as the only Son of the Father. Jesus is the light. Now it struck me as I was going over our transfiguration account that we see that enacted in our transfiguration account.

And we actually see an explanation of who Jesus is as it's being enacted if we look at John 1.

Which never shows up on the lectionary for the Feast of the Transfiguration, unfortunately.

[12:41] But in John 1, we read, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything that was made, that was made.

In Him was life. And the life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. That is Jesus.

His disciples saw it before their very eyes when they saw Him transfigured. They saw His glory.

Looking at John 1 again, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. That is what the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

They saw the One who was with God and was God from the beginning, who was the light of the world, a light that would never be overcome. They saw God in the flesh dwelling among them.

[13:45] They saw the glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. And they couldn't mistake it that here was one who was more than a prophet, one to whom both the law and the prophets bear witness, one even greater than Moses, who they see bearing witness to Him.

Greater than Moses because looking again in John 1, we see that the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Moses, great prophet that He was, was never the way, the truth, and the life.

That is Jesus. The law was given by Moses and it was good, but it couldn't do what Christ has done.

It could show that the unworthy are rightly condemned, but only Jesus can save the unworthy through His shed blood and mighty resurrection. The law could tell us what we ought to do, but couldn't give us the power to do it.

But grace and truth came through the One who was transfigured before His disciples, revealed to them for who He is. And who He is is more than a good teacher, more than a prophet, more than a good example.

[15:11] He is the Son of God in human flesh, the light of the world, and we have seen His glory. The disciples see His glory.

The Father tells them to listen to Him. Tells us through the Word to listen to Him, to believe on Him. Why is that? Because to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

And today, to all who receive Him and who believe in His name, He gives the right to become the children of God. The Jesus that His disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Jesus that you know, the one who shines with the glory of God, the one who is dazzling to behold because He is the light of the world, the one who was with God and was God from the beginning, the one, the only one who can give the right to make us children of God through faith in His name.

Is that the Jesus that you know? That is the living Lord and Savior. Believe in Him this morning.

[16:37] Listen to Him. Trust Him as Savior. Follow Him and obey Him as Lord of your life.

Brothers and sisters, from His fullness, we all have received grace upon grace.

We have received, not merely for ourselves, but that we might be sent. Sent to those who do not yet know Jesus.

sent to those who are confused about who Jesus is and what He has done or even hostile to His message. We have been sent.

We are being sent with an earth-shattering, life-changing message. Jesus is the Father's beloved and only Son, our only Savior, our only hope of eternal life.

listen to Him. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.