

**Mark 9:2-9: After six days Jesus 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. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” <sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> 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.**

Dear fellow children of God:

Of all the miracles of Jesus, which is your favorite? One of my personal favorites is Jesus calming storm, especially when it seems there are more storm clouds than sunshine. How about you? Jesus walking on water? Feeding 5000? Raising Lazarus from the dead? The text in front of us this morning probably wouldn't make many people's "top five miracles of Jesus" list. In the context of life here on earth, it isn't something that would happen to anyone other than the very Son of God. And yet today we make our annual trip up a mountain in Galilee to witness a miracle unlike any other miracle of Jesus. No one is sick and then healed, dead and then raised, hungry and then fed. No one came looking for help, no one said, "Jesus, let's go up a mountain and watch you get transfigured." Yet it certainly qualifies as a miracle.

This event occurs shortly after Jesus had questioned the disciples about who they thought he was. Peter offered a beautiful confession of faith: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Unfortunately, as soon as Jesus described his mission as something that involved pain and suffering and death, this same Peter challenged this very Son of God and not only questioned, but actually challenged Jesus' mission. “You, Jesus, are the Son of God! This can't happen to you.” It's as though Peter is saying, “Jesus, if you are the Son of God, why would you **let** this happen to you.”

And so now Jesus leads three of his disciples—Peter, James and John—up a mountain and offer them an audible and visible display of his majesty and power so that when they witnessed his suffering and agony they would realize he wasn't an unfortunate victim of his enemies. Our theme this morning is:

## Follow Jesus up the mountain

### 1. Recognize his glory

### 2. Listen to his message

Our text says: “**After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.**” This same story is found in Matthew and Luke, and Luke adds the fact that they went up the mountain to pray. That is probably what the disciples expected...the honor of praying with Jesus. What happens to the disciples is what happens so often with us. God gives them more than they imagined possible. “**There he was transfigured before them.**” The Greek word for transfigured is the same word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis”...a change in form or appearance.

And this change was beyond striking: **His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.** Matthew and Luke provide more details: Matthew describes it: “**His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light**” (Mt 17:2). Luke says, “**The appearance of his face was changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning**” (Lk 9:29). It's easy for us who have heard the story of Jesus' transfiguration before to focus on the manifestations of his glory rather than the fact that this is the glory of the very Son of God. This appearance of Jesus in his glory was new for the disciples, but it wasn't new for Jesus. This is the glory that Jesus had from eternity. This is the glory that exceeds the glory of the choir of angels that heralded Jesus' birth in the night sky over Bethlehem, this is the glory that Moses asked to see on Mount Sinai and God only allowed him to look at his backside as he passed by.

And now 1400 years after Moses saw the glory of God's back, along with Elijah he once again stands in the presence of God's glory. **And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.** What was their topic of conversation? Luke says, “**They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.**” *Spoke about his departure.* If you think about it, that seems a bit unusual. Two of the greatest heroes and prophets of the Old Testament have come from heaven to visit Jesus in all of his glory. And what do they talk about? The latest news from heaven? The number of miracles that Jesus has performed in his ministry? Questions about what life is like for someone who is true God and true man? No, they talk about the cross that Jesus soon will bear, not just the cross on which he'll hang, but the cross of shame and suffering and sin. You wonder if Moses flashed back to the first promise of the Savior spoken by God that Moses had recorded in Genesis 3. You

wonder if he thought about the first Passover and the blood of a lamb the symbolized the blood the Lamb of God would soon shed. You wonder if Elijah thought back to how he had suffered for his faithful preaching of repentance and recognized how his suffering paled in comparison to Jesus suffering for all sins of all people of all time.

*They spoke about his departure.* Here is Jesus shining with the splendor of the sun and they look ahead to the day the sun will turn dark. God the Father sends Moses and Elijah to converse with Jesus and they talk about the day that God the Father will turn his back on his only Son. Why would Jesus want have that conversation? But might it not be that it was for this very purpose that God sent these two men? Jesus was facing a terminal diagnosis and all of his closest friends are in denial. No one wanted to talk to him about the reality of what he is facing. And not only does Jesus want to talk about this diagnosis, but he embraces it, this Jesus who didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead Jesus counted it as his greatest glory to stricken by God, afflicted with the shame of our sins, despised and rejected by the very people he came to save, and all for what? All for the glory of the achieving the title he craved: the title Savior, a title he craved so that he could bestow on us our greatest title: Children of the heavenly Father.

And what about Peter, James and John during all of this talk about what Jesus was going to face? Luke tells us that **“they were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.”** In our text Mark tell us, **Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”**

Peter was right...it was good for them to be here. But he didn't understand **why** it was good. Peter still hasn't learned his lesson from 6 days earlier. Jesus didn't leave the glory of heaven so that he could enjoy the glory of his transfiguration. He didn't leave heaven so that he could have a conversation with Moses & Elijah on some random hill in Galilee. Before his humble birth he had been able to converse with Moses, Elijah and any other Old Testament prophet in the glory of heaven. He left the glory of heaven so that he could achieve our salvation on a much different and darker mountain than this mountain of bright, shining glory.

Mark tells us that **“Peter did not know what to say.”** As has happened before and will happen again, Peter didn't realize that when you don't know what to say you're better off not saying anything at all. And Peter didn't realize that the greatest way to honor the Son of God is not to speak, but to listen. There Peter was, in the presence of the Jesus he had confessed as the long promised Messiah, in the presence of the author of the first five books of the Bible and in the presence of one of the greatest

preachers of the Old Testament. And instead of listening, Peter wants to offer his advice. Today as we follow Jesus up this mountain, may we not just **(1.) recognize his glory** but also **(2.) listen to his message.**

**II. Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** Matthew tells us that when Peter, James and John heard God the Father speak from heaven they fell facedown to the ground, terrified, and for good reason. Not only were they in the presence of the Son of God, not only had they seen Jesus in his glory, but now the holy, almighty God the Father was speaking directly to them. “This is my beloved Son, listen to him.”

Listen to what? Listen to what Jesus says about his impending suffering and death. Listen to Jesus when he says as he did a week earlier: **“The Son of Man will suffer many things...and so will you.”** Listen to Jesus when he says, **“This is why I have come.”** Listen to Jesus when he says that if I am a follower of Jesus, then following him means taking up my own cross. And perhaps especially God was begging the disciples, “Please, please listen to my Son when he tells you he must die. Please don’t deny the need for his death, for you are not just the cause and reason for his death, you are the purpose for his death; and then listen, listen, listen when he says that he will die and then, then, three days later, he will rise from the dead because death cannot hold him, and so then neither will death hold you.”

Listen to Jesus. How could they not? All of the evidence in front of them, and yet they only processed what they wanted to see and hear. Really no different than us. How many Christmases have we heard the message of the angels, how many trips have we made to Cana and heard Jesus tell Mary, “My time has not yet come”? How many storms has Jesus calmed for us, but then next time the seas get rough we panic and ask, “Jesus, where are you now?”

Listen to Jesus. Listen to the promises of the one who left behind all of his glory in heaven so that he could keep every promise he’s ever made. Listen to Jesus when at his personal invitation you stand at the Lord’s table next weekend and receive in his very body and blood the certainty of your forgiveness.

**<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.** All they saw was Jesus, but seeing Jesus, they saw all they needed. Seeing Jesus, they **had** all they needed.

And so it is with us. The miracle of Jesus’ transfiguration has perhaps even GREATER relevance for us than Jesus’ healing miracles, because we aren’t always healed, but miracle of J transfiguration means that the sheer glory of what happened on that mountain 2000 years ago is the glory that awaits us.

And consider this: As we celebrate Jesus’ transfiguration, the greatest miracle wasn’t really that Jesus appears in glory. The glory was always his. The miracle, if you will, is that this glorious Son of God left

that glory behind for a manger in Bethlehem, a hometown that rejected him, for a ministry where he had no place to lay his head, for ministry that was spurned by those he loved so dearly; that he left behind not for the bright white Mount of Glory, but for the blood red Mount Calvary.

That is a miracle. That conscious choice of God the Son: to accept the mission that his Father laid out for him, that conscious, deliberate premeditated choice that he made before creation, that willingness to leave it all behind for a mission that would end at a bloody cross. Jesus left all of his glory so that you and I would have not the glory of a mountain in Israel, but the glory of a mansion in heaven. Jesus did all of that for the joy set before him. Where can you find that joy? Look in the mirror, for it is you. You are Jesus's joy. What a miracle indeed. Amen.