

Transfiguration Sermon on Luke 9:28-36, Year C, March 3&4 2019

To be a fly on the wall, right?

There are some Bible stories that just grab our attention – they are so out of the everyday experience that I just wish I could be a fly on the wall.

We can dust off the old imagination station and do our best to recreate that mountain top, but what was it actually like to see Jesus in all of his glory. Mark describes Jesus' clothes as "dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach them." Matthew and Luke, say that the very appearance of his face changed and his clothes were like a flash of lightning.

It is one of the times when I wish I could have been a fly buzzing around that mountaintop, when the cloud came down, Jesus was changed, Moses and Elijah show up and the Father's voice fills the air.

But I wasn't there. Only three people got to experience that mountaintop – Peter, James and John.

For one brief afternoon, after years of following Jesus' every move, these three disciples get this little glimpse at the real glory of Jesus.

If you stop and think about it, it begs the question: why?

Why now? He spent over 30 years on this earth and just in this brief moment, for one afternoon, on this mountaintop, to these three guys does he fully reveal who he really is. Sure, throughout his ministry he gave hints as to who he really was with his amazing miracles, but even the prophets did miracles, even the disciples did miracles. This was on a whole different level. This was undeniable proof that Jesus was who he said he was – true God. Why now?

Why only these three? I'm sure there would have been plenty of other people who would have been interested in seeing Jesus in all of his glory chatting it up with Moses and Elijah. Why just these three?

Why did he do it?

Why? Well, God doesn't spell it all out for us, but based on what happens next, at least some of his reasoning becomes clear.

Why? Well, first of all, because Jesus knew just how much these three would need the memory of this day. Jesus had hand-picked these three to be leaders among leaders in his church and he knew how good it was for them to be here, witnessing this.

You see, to this point in their relationship the disciples had been on a pretty amazing ride with Jesus. I mean, just think about all the amazing things they had seen: every once in a while you see a viral video on the news showing someone who was deaf for their whole lives hearing for the first time because of modern medicine – it's a tear-jerking, priceless moment. These disciples got to witness stuff like that practically every single day. They got to see the jaw-dropped expression of someone who has been blind from birth and can now suddenly see all of the beauties of God's creation. They got to see the silly hopping, dancing and running of people who for the first time in their lives felt strength and coordination in their previously crippled legs.

They got to swell with pride standing in the back of synagogue after synagogue as they scanned the audience and saw every glued on Jesus, hanging on his every word because they knew that was their Jesus, the guy they got to follow and know in ways these other people could only dream of because they had been called to be his disciples.

They could wipe the sweat from their brow after gathering twelve baskets of left-over fish and bread, but they couldn't wipe the awe from their faces realizing that Jesus had just fed over 5000 people with a few loaves of bread and a couple small fish.

There had been some bumps along the way, some run-ins with some of the Pharisees, who weren't nearly as impressed with Jesus as they should have been, but those were barely blips on the radar in what had been an amazingly awesome ride with Jesus.

But all of that was about to come to an end.

Right before Luke's transfiguration account he recounts Jesus' perplexing and unsettling prediction that he was going to suffer many things and be killed. Even up on this mountaintop as we get the smallest glimpses into the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, Luke tells us, "They spoke about [Jesus'] departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."

In Matthew's account of the Transfiguration, the story right after this ends with Jesus ominously saying, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him."

Just a couple of days later Luke would say of Jesus, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

God knew what was coming. And so that day, even if it was just for one afternoon, Jesus knew what Peter confessed, it was good for them to be there. It was good for them to be seeing him like this – seeing him how he really is, true God...

Because in not too long, on another mountain, eyes would be fixed on Jesus, but this time he wouldn't look all that glorious. In not too long, they would be looking up at Jesus beaten, bloodied, and dying on a cross.

And in a moment like that, at a low like that (after the highs of following Jesus) Jesus knew it was good for his disciples to have the memory of this day on the mount of Transfiguration because their faith would be tested.

Jesus knew that when the low points come in this world, when disaster and death come close to our hearts, the devil comes right on its heels telling his age-old lies. Jesus knew that his cross would break their hearts breaking to pieces, tearing away the Jesus they had come to love. Jesus knew that when it looked like he was suffering seemingly helplessly at the hands of his enemies, those voices would be screaming in his disciples heads, "What if we were wrong to put all our hope in Jesus? Was this all just one big mistake?"

Jesus knew the doubts and fear was coming. He knew that after the day of suffering at the cross there would be many more days of trial in the lives of these three disciples. And so he gave them in afternoon on the Mount of Transfiguration. He gave them this little glimpse of who he really was so that when those dark, low moments came, and they were tempted they could cling to this memory – Jesus was who he said he was. They had seen it with their own eyes.

It was good for them to be there because this little taste of awesome glory, this little afternoon of unveiled Gospel truth – the good news that Jesus is God's Son come to earth for us – because Jesus knew this was the only thing that could these disciples through the dark days to come.

That's one reason why Jesus did what he did on that mountain. Jesus did it because he knew *they* would need it. Jesus also did it because he knew *you* would need it.

Friends today the church is cloaked in white, we are singing beautiful hymns about our powerful and beautiful Savior. But all of this bright beauty and glory is about to come to an end. At the end of this service we will be saying goodbye to alleluia. In three days when you walk back into this building on Wednesday, instead of white you will see black and purple (the colors of death and suffering), instead of songs of beauty you will be singing songs about the filth and darkness of sin.

We, just like those early disciples, are about to embark on a somber journey with Jesus to the cross (that what the church season of Lent is all about)– a journey which is going to bring us face to face with our own darkness, the sinfulness that infects our hearts, *our* sins that drove Jesus to that cross, and pounded those nails in.

For the 40 days of Lent the brightness of this day is going to be hidden, muted, and reserved because the next forty days are all about sin, and the very real consequences of sin.

And so just like it was good for those disciples, on the precipice of the darkness of Jesus' death, to be on the Mount of Transfiguration, it's good for us to be here too. It's good be getting one last glimpse, one last memory of the true glory of Jesus to cling to in the dark days to come. One last flash of glory to refresh and encourage until Easter morning brings the Alleluias back again.

But there's another reason it's good for us to be here today – beyond just getting ready for Lent.

Friends, from where I'm standing I can look out and see a bunch of people who have known some pretty dark days – days when depression and disaster and death forced their way into your lives. Some of you have gaping wounds right now, some with scars from years ago.

I also know that the death rate is still one-for-one, which means that every person you know is going to die. Every person you love is going to die, and you are probably going to have to stand there and helplessly watch a good number of them die, like those Jesus' followers on that other mountain called Calvary.

If your life isn't particularly dark right now, you and I both know it is just a matter of time.

And so today, even if it's only for the hour that you are here in this building, it is good for you to be here. It's good for you to be seeing Jesus like this – seeing him how he really is, in all of his glory.

Because when the darkness comes, right on its heels will come the trial and the testing of your faith. When the darkness comes the devil is going to be right there with it, challenging you to put your money where your mouth is, whispering his lies in your ears.

And Jesus knows that... He knows that when you are neck deep in the darkness of sin, when your heart is broken to pieces, those ugly voices are going to start chirping away, "Can you really trust Jesus? Is he really good? Does he really care about you?"

Jesus knows your days of trials will be many and so he gives you a day like today. You may not have been a fly on that hill, but he had these words recorded so that when those dark days come you have something to hold on to.

Look at Jesus standing on this mountain today and realize that everything he has done to this moment has been *for you*. Realize that everything he is about to do, he will do *for you*.

This little glimpse at his true glory is just a teaser, just a tiny foretaste of glory he has planned for you forever. This day on the Mount of Transfiguration is just one more memory that Jesus had recorded in the Bible *for you* – a memory that can you can cling to in the darkest of days because it's one more proof in the face of the devils lies that Jesus is who he said he was, and he can, and he did, and he will save you.

It's good for us to be here today, friends, standing on the precipice of God only know what dark times because it's one more proof that beyond that darkness waits the eternal glories of heaven, bought and paid for by Jesus our Savior.

Amen.