

## The Transfiguration of Our Lord, A ✕ D 2010

### Matthew 17:1-9

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 It's not always a privilege to be in the inner circle of the Lord's disciples. Sure, maybe you get to see things that the other nine disciples did not get to see, but all of that comes at a price. In this inner circle of three—Peter, James, and John—the questions are harder and the expectations are higher. Six days before Jesus' transfiguration, He asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and upon this Rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." From then on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. From the inner circle of the disciples, Peter protested. "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But Jesus turned to Peter and said to him, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man."

2 Having endured this stinging rebuke from Jesus, you might think Peter would have learned not to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be crucified. But even now, beholding his Lord's transfiguration, Peter suggests against continuing to Jerusalem. "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." The rebuke was gentler than the one Peter received from Jesus earlier, but the point is the same: there's no deterring Jesus from His journey to the cross outside Jerusalem. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." Peter wanted to protect his Lord from the shame and humiliation of the cross. He wanted God on his own terms.

3 Peter's adventure in missing the point continued all the way to Jerusalem, as well. To Peter's contention that "though all others fall away, I will never fall away," Jesus answered that before the rooster crowed its morning alarm, Peter would, in fact, deny Him three times. Later in Gethsamane, after being unable to stay awake for even an hour to pray, Peter thought to protect the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, the King of Kings by swinging his puny sword at one of the would-be captors of Jesus. Another rebuke: "Put your sword away. Do you not think I can call upon my Father and He will send legions of angels? But I am to drink the cup He has appointed for me to drink." In the morning, Peter lived up to the Lord's prediction, adamantly denying three times even knowing Jesus. This time it was the rooster whose crow provided the firm rebuke. Later, after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, Peter would still need rebuking. When he supposed that the Gospel was only for the Jews, God rebuked Peter directly: "Do not call anything unclean which I have made clean." When Peter wanted to impose Jewish ceremonial laws on Gentile converts, God used Paul to oppose Peter to his face.

4 Who's really that different from Peter? Even when you get the questions right, you fail to comprehend what that answer truly means. Would you fight to defend God's honor, to keep Him from the cross, to defend Him from public scandal, to hide some parts of Christianity from scrutinizing eyes?

Don't you share his do-it-on-my-own-terms attitude? Don't you have a similar aversion to the offensiveness of the cross? When the going gets tough, aren't you likewise more interested in self-preservation than in making a bold confession of the faith? Wouldn't you greatly prefer a more sanitized Christianity, one without such expectations on your life, one that doesn't demand you leave your old, comfortable sinful life, one that doesn't offer as its central theme a bloody crucifixion of God, one that makes for polite, party conversation? Peter's pride is your own as well. It's this pride, this selfishness that is evident in your troubled marriage, your rocky relationship with fellow Christians, your enmity toward your neighbors, your strife with your parents. The problem is you. That's why Peter protests Jesus going to the cross. If Jesus dies on the cross, that must mean there is no way for Peter to save himself. If Jesus goes to Jerusalem to die, it can only be because you aren't a good person, not even a little bit. If they descend the mountain to go to Jerusalem, Peter will have to abandon all his pride, and so will you. If God dies for sinners, it is because there is nothing good within you. Repent.

5 Jesus is going to Jerusalem; there's no diverting Him, no changing His path. This is why He came. There is no ram caught in a thicket to prevent the sacrifice of the Son. He is the Lamb caught in the thicket of humanity's sinfulness. This is what the Son of God is discussing with Moses and Elijah, His coming departure, His impending death on the cross. Nothing can keep Him from His appointed destination, not Peter's intervention nor yours, not Peter's rebellion nor yours, not Peter's denial nor yours. He is God in the flesh to deal with humanity's sinfulness, to save His people from their sin. His tremendous love for you is what keeps Him from being deterred. He will love you back into fellowship with Himself by pouring out His blood as the ransom price for your rebellion. He died for sinners, for Peter, for Moses, for Elijah, for James and John, for you.

6 Learn from Peter about this Lord who forgives. Even after Peter's gaffe on Mt. Tabor at the Transfiguration, Jesus came to Peter and touched him. When the disciples heard the voice of God the Father, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise and have no fear." Peter the denier gets a special inclusion in the command of the angels at Jesus' resurrection to the women, "Go and tell his disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee." And when the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples and made them breakfast, three times He commanded Peter, "Feed my sheep."

7 There's comfort in the company gathered with Jesus on Mt. Tabor. Moses is no different from Peter, nor is Elijah. Moses' frail faith is displayed when he took matters into his own hands and murdered an Egyptian to fight for God's people. And his reluctance to obey God's command to be the instrument through which the Lord would deliver His people earned Moses a rebuke similar to those delivered to Peter. Moses was a doubter, a murderer, a complainer, a lousy leader. And yet, here he is at the Transfiguration, gathered in glory with the Lord who saves doubters, murderers, complainers, lousy leaders, and more. Elijah's hardly

any better. When things looked a little threatening, Elijah fled into the wilderness and griped to God that He called him to be a prophet and left him alone. Elijah preferred death to serving as God's mouthpiece. And yet, here he is, in glory with Jesus who saves His people from their griping, their pride, their self-centeredness, their sin. Transfiguration gives a picture of your hope: sinners gathered with Jesus, transfigured from their sin-scarred bodies into glorious bodies, free from sin and suffering.

8 In the Transfiguration of Jesus, Peter, James, and John were given a glimpse into the future, into your future. Sure, there was a cross and a crucifixion that lie ahead of them, but the cross made possible this vision. Sinners like Moses and Elijah have hope because Jesus died for sinners. Sinners like Peter have hope because Jesus died for sinners. Sinners like you have hope because Jesus died for sinners. Peter is not an example of failure. He is an example of faithfulness. Christians live with two identities: sinner and saint. The only cure is repentance and forgiveness. Being where Jesus delivers His loving rebuke is also being where He delivers His forgiveness.

9 Learn comfort from the example of St. Peter. With sins forgiven, Peter faced death undaunted. He spread out his arms in death and surrendered his life in bold confession of his Lord's mercy and forgiveness. God has made you His beloved child in Holy Baptism, about which Peter declared, "Baptism now saves you." And here at His altar, while you do not behold Jesus in His glory as Peter, James, and John did, you nevertheless receive the very same Jesus. He gives you Himself, His true Body and Blood, veiling His glory in ordinary bread and wine. And having delivered to you the forgiveness He died to obtain for you, having touched your lips, He comforts you, "Rise and have no fear."

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer