

The Transfiguration of Our Lord – 2020
Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus certainly didn't like what Peter said, but the Lord understood where it came from. Peter suffered a rebuke unlike any other in the whole of Scripture. Oh man, did Peter suffer a rebuke. Jesus was fierce. "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man" (Matthew 16:23). Do you think that stung? A clear and sunny day for Peter had turned into a megawatt storm – in an instant. It was a rebuke that he never forgot.

It had all started innocently enough. Jesus was teaching the disciples; leading them down a blessed road of theological discovery. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). The disciples proceed to convey all the nonsensical talk that was out on the street about who Jesus was. Then the Lord Christ zeroes in on His disciples. What about you? Who do you say that I am? Peter, blessed Peter, Peter gives voice to the faith that abides in you and me. What did Peter say? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus is ecstatic. Peter saw nothing more with his eyes than an itinerant preacher. Humble, simple, human, ordinary; yes, Peter saw the miracles but faith is having the eyes of your heart opened to those things which are hidden from the eyes in your head.

The elated Christ lavishes a beatitude on the one who from then on is to be called "the Rock." "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). The Lord then spoke of His church, about forgiveness and the keys to the kingdom of heaven – all in response to Peter's blessed confession. Smiles were all around. It was a champagne day. Our Lord leads them further. Deeper into the mysteries of God's grace, deeper into the wonder of God's glory – our blessed Lord taught them what it meant to be the Christ. Jerusalem and a cross; Jerusalem and being handed over; Jerusalem and blood and shame and death – that's what it means to be the Christ, that is God's intent, and Jesus was going to fulfill God's plan. It is in motion. It is moving toward them. The Christ must be killed and on the third day be raised (Matthew 16:21).

Peter's mind reeled. If Jesus' teaching were something in Peter's mouth, he would have spit it out right on the spot. Peter had his own religion and he wasn't about to give it up. In Peter's religion, the Christ is the Valiant Conqueror, the Apex of Divine Authority, the Heroic Victor who reigns triumphant at every step. Peter unleashed his personal religion on Jesus. "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you'" (Matthew 16:22). And that is when Jesus puts dear Peter in his unhappy place. Jesus certainly didn't like what Peter said, but our Lord understood where it came from.

Do you know how gracious God is? Do you know how loving and patient and supremely devoted to you He is? In a multitude of ways, God looks after you, blessing you, teaching you about Himself, His purposes, His life and His connection to you, a beloved son, a beloved daughter – to lead you and guide you and help you to discover the truth that is all around you. We get full of ourselves, don't we, you and I? Every single one of us – we want our own way, we adore our own ideas, we think that we have Christianity by the tail, that we have learned all that there is to learn about God, His work and His ways. Jesus doesn't just lay a stern reprimand

on Peter. Jesus teaches him, loves him, blesses him. That why the Lord Christ took Peter, James and John up the mountain. You might as well be there with them for the teaching, Christ's teaching, the same teaching comes to you; the force of that teaching comes to you. Why? Because Jesus loves you, blesses you, is connected to you.

Up the mountain they go. And Jesus is transfigured. He is changed, remarkably so, right in front of their eyes. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became white as light. His deity is shining through His humanity. True God and true man in one person. Glorious! Astounding! Moses and Elijah appear and converse with Jesus about His impending death in Jerusalem, His resurrection, His deliverance of humanity from the reign of sin and death. Peter, James and John see it! There is a purpose in all this, a reason, a rationale why all this should be happening. The voice in the cloud, the Father's voice, makes it all come together. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5).

Peter! When my Son speaks to you about His cross, abandon your own thoughts and listen to Him! See Him in His glory? That is what you are to see with the eyes of your heart as He hangs triumphant on the Holy Cross. Only if you listen to Him will you be able to see it aright! This has very much to do with you. False ideas, false religious ideas will come to you and on occasion you will entertain them. When you are feeling abandoned, when a dark and unhappy cloud is over your heart, your heavenly Father encourages you... listen to Him! What does the Lord Christ say to you? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). That is you. Project those words onto the cross and listen to Him. "I will never leave you, never forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

When Satan or his demonic messenger whispers lies about forgiveness, that you are outside of God's grace, or that you have soiled yourself beyond redemption, listen to Him, listen to God's Son! "Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Sin has been vanquished. Death has been defeated. He sets a table for sinners and welcomes them. Listen to Him! "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He calls Himself your friend. Listen to Him! When you listen to Him, you are blessed. Courage arises from His voice. Humility and certainty and fidelity arise from His voice. You need these things in this life. (Ted Hanson).

This world has its own religion. It will give voice to it without ceasing. Your ears are prone to what is false. Unfortunately, sometimes it rattles around in your head and then it may come out of your mouth. Jesus doesn't like it but He understands where it comes from. Fear, doubt, conceit; it all surrounded the Son of God. He set His face toward Jerusalem and when He found His way up to the cross, it enveloped Him. The Lord of the cross died to render all of the world's vanity impotent. Crucified, the world was given an epiphany of the love of God in Christ Jesus. He is the Valiant One – precisely as He suffers. We did not choose Him. He chose us. God's truth is not what man would envision – it is a divine undertaking, a divine revelation, a divine achievement. It makes the weak strong. It makes the unrighteous righteous. It makes those dead in sins alive with Christ's resurrection. We will listen to Him! We will grow and prosper and continue to sit at His feet and listen to Him. Faith can do no other. The faith which He has breathed into us can do no other. Glory be to God alone.