

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

We hear these words from our Gospel reading again - **Matthew chapter 17:4-5** “**And Peter said to Jesus, ‘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.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’**” So far the word of the Lord...

Oftentimes we use the phrase “mountaintop-experience” to describe some sort of spiritual encounter, a time of awakening and clarity, a moment of epiphany. So it is fitting that the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany is the greatest mountaintop-experience of all time. Of course, we know that climbing to a mountaintop won’t bring us any closer to God. He’s already everywhere. And yet, if you’ve ever done any mountain climbing or hiking, you know that there is a sense in which we do feel closer to heaven when we stand on a mountain summit.

And there’s a reason for this. In the Old Testament, many of the greatest encounters with God occurred on mountaintops. Think of Moses, the great lawgiver. He received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, where he went forty days and nights without food or drink. And then also consider Elijah, the great prophet. He also traveled forty days without food or drink to climb that same mountain and speak with God.

One wonders - what was it like to be on that mountain with God? It was both awesome, in the proper sense of the word, and terrible. The people of Israel stood at the bottom and waited for Moses to descend. They saw the great cloud of glory filled with lightning and thunder, but they dared not approach. God had warned them, “**Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of**

it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death” (Exodus 19:12). That’s the trouble with encountering the raw glory of God. He is so extremely holy, so intensely pure, that sinful man cannot see His face and live. As we heard in the Old Testament reading last week, not even Moses could look directly upon God’s glory. Likewise, Elijah, experienced a great whirlwind, a devouring fire, and an earthquake. In summary, these encounters with God and His glory were terrifying.

And yet, God wants to dwell among His people. Prior to the Fall into sin, God would come to the Garden of Eden to walk with Adam in the evening. This is the relationship God desired to have with us, but it was utterly destroyed by sin. And yet, God’s purpose would be accomplished. In the fullness of time, God descended to us and dwelt among men once more - Immanuel, God with us. From the moment of His conception, all the terrific majesty and all the bright glory of God belonged to Jesus. But He hid His glory as a baby, as a child, and then as a man. If you had seen Jesus as He walked on the earth, nothing would have stood out about His physical appearance. Scripture says, **“He had no form or beauty that we would desire him” (Isaiah 53:2).** And yet, all the radiant glory of God was there in Jesus - only it was hidden. This is what the theologians call the Humiliation of Christ. Now He is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, and yet He is still fully man. Christ humbled Himself when as a man He hid his glory.

Still, there were moments when Jesus briefly revealed His glory. Whenever Jesus performed a miracle - healed the sick, cleansed lepers, gave sight to the blind, or raised the dead - He revealed a small part of His power. And then, once again on a mountain, Jesus provided three of His closest disciples a glimpse of the glory that was His from eternity. For just a moment they saw Him as He truly is, more radiant than the sun, with even His clothes shining bright as light. Moses and Elijah,

who had encountered the glory of God were there too. And then there was the bright cloud, the very presence of God the Father, the thunderous voice from heaven. It was simply too much for the disciples to handle. They fell on their faces in sheer terror. Too much power. Too much holiness. Too much glory.

Now what does all this mean? Certainly, these events are real, historical fact. This did happen. But why? Why did Jesus reveal His glory to the disciples? And why is this written for us? First, Jesus' Transfiguration shows us what we have lost. It is a sad thing that we cannot be in the presence of God's glory without terror. This was never God's intention. He created us to be His companions, His people, to share in perfect communion with Him forever. However, sin destroyed this relationship and separated us from God. If two of the holiest men in the Bible, Moses and Elijah, could barely encounter God and had to be shielded from his glory - if the apostles Peter, James, and John fell on their faces in terror, what hope is there for sinful you and sinful me?

But second, and more importantly, the Transfiguration shows us God's plan of redemption. The key to understanding this is found in Luke's account of the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-36). Luke tells us that Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about His upcoming "departure," or more accurately in the Greek, His "exodus" (Lk 9:31). We all know about Moses and the great Exodus of the Old Testament. He led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land. But have you ever heard of Jesus and His even greater "exodus"? You have, even if you don't realize it. What could be worse than slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt? Slavery to sin, death, and the devil. This is the "exodus" that Jesus was about to lead. He came to earth as a man, His power and His glory hidden, for one purpose - to hang upon the cross for the sins of the whole world, and in His death to

defeat death forever. Jesus had come to lead His people out of bondage from sin, death, and the devil, and to open the way to the true Promised Land, that is heaven. Moses' Exodus was simply a foreshadowing of Jesus' "exodus". From the beginning, God had been putting all the pieces in place for the Redemption of the world. And now Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about His own upcoming "exodus".

At that moment, Peter, who often failed to understand what Jesus was doing, decided to speak up - **“Peter said to Jesus, “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.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!” (Matt 17:4-5).**

Oh Peter! Jesus is talking about the "exodus", listen to Him. Listen to God's plan to deliver you from sin, death, and every evil forever. Listen to the words of Jesus, which alone can comfort the terrified conscience and remove guilt. Listen to Jesus, who has come to restore the broken relationship between God and man, so that we may once again be in His presence, as Adam was, without fear. From the beginning God desired for man to share in His glory and holiness. We were created in His image. But once we fell into sin, the only way to restore what was lost was for God to share in our suffering, to descend His holy mountain into our broken world, to take our sin into His own body, and to die the death that every sinner deserved.

Instead of listening to Peter's idea to pitch tents - the Father said to Peter, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to Him!*”** In a way, He was saying - follow My Son back down the mountain, into Jerusalem, to another mountain - the mountain of Calvary. See Him suffer

and die in your place. Listen to Him say, “It is finished.” And then witness our risen Savior three days later.

God’s plan to restore fallen man was accomplished in Jesus’ great “exodus”. He was not content to remain in glory high upon the heavenly mountain. Instead, He descended to us, in order to raise us up to glory with Him. And we have His promise that one day - we too will share in the glory that Peter, James, and John witnessed upon the mountain. St. Paul writes, **“Our Lord Jesus Christ, will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body” (Phil 3:21)**. And when that day comes, we won’t need tents. No, we will dwell in heavenly rooms (Jn 14:12) in the presence of God forever. Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.