

February 14, 2010
Transfiguration Sunday

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Making "Sense" of the Transfiguration

In the name of Jesus, our glorious Lord and Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

When it comes to remembering an event, a general truth is that the more senses that are involved in the event, the more memorable it is. For this reason a person may practice recitations out loud. At times the very act of writing something down can help us to remember it. Even the sense of smell may trigger memories, such as when we walk into Grandma's house and recall chocolate chip cookies or some such thing.

Today we consider the senses that Jesus brought into play with His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. They not only saw Jesus in His glory, they heard the voice of the Father, and they felt His touch. As we read in our second reading, this event was burned into the memory of Peter.

We also want to remember this important event in the life of Jesus. We recall it every year just before Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent. How can we use our senses to remember His transfiguration? We use our faith. We have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit - able to see where there was once only darkness and confusion. Jesus has given us ears to hear not just the syllables but to have those words in our hearts by faith. And through faith we can trust that Jesus will give to us just what we need as He did the disciples. May the Holy Spirit strengthen that faith as we study His Word this morning.

1. Look at Jesus in His true glory

When Jesus walked this earth He said and did many things that made it clear that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. However, you could not tell that He was true God just by looking at Him. He humbled Himself when He came to this earth. He didn't appear to be majestic or powerful. The cloaking of His glory was so effective that his closest friends forgot who He was. Even after seeing His miracles firsthand, they became afraid when a storm came up on the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus was in the boat with them! The enemies of Jesus even knowing that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, believed that they could

subdue Him with swords and clubs.

Jesus gave three of His disciples a glimpse of who He really is. *He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.* Jesus lifted off the veil and showed His glory as the Son of God. He was no street magician, or some ordinary prophet. The change in His appearance reflected who He was on the inside - the almighty Son of God.

This is a reminder that we need because there are many times that we seem to forget who Jesus truly is. Yes, I know that that belief is in our hearts, but like the disciples we try to solve problems by ourselves forgetting that Jesus has the power to change any circumstances in our lives. We feel unnecessarily guilty when we forget that Jesus, the Son of God, has completely forgiven us our sins. There are times that we think Him to be ordinary because we worship and pay more attention to people and things that have no heavenly glory.

Heavenly glory is foreign to us as sinners. We have a concept of earthly glory, but we don't encounter heavenly glory except on the pages of Holy Scripture. It is unattainable to us except for the fact that Jesus has promise it to us. It is good for us to see it not only in Christ, but also to recognize that Moses and Elijah had attained it as believers whose earthly pilgrimage was over. They were sinners on earth, but in the end because of the work of Christ, they were saints.

We need this reminder because as the apostle Paul explains so well in Romans 7 there is a struggle within us between old man and new man. The good that we want to do, we don't do, and the evil that we don't want to do, we end up doing. However, as a Christian, your true self is that new man. You will shed your sinful flesh in death, and what will last is that new man that Jesus has created within you. That future expectation of glory in Christ helps you to forget the past and deal with the present.

2. Listen to the words of the Father and the Son

As the disciples were enjoying the view, Peter responded with the offer to build some tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so that they could stay up there indefinitely. Here is when the Lord involved the sense of hearing to incorporate another memory into the moment. *While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* This voice brought them

down to the ground in fright. Was it the unexpectedness? The authority or holiness of the voice? We can't be sure, but certainly the words themselves were more instructive than frightening. The spectacular visuals were not enough. There would also be verbal confirmation that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

According to the account from Luke the disciples had also heard Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus about His upcoming death in Jerusalem. Now this wouldn't seem to add up. Here you have the Father identifying Jesus as His beloved Son. He says that He is well pleased with Him - and remember this is the Father saying that He is well pleased. Jesus is identified as the Son of God. Then you have to add in the fact that He is going to die.

What you have to add to the equation is the love of God for humanity. It was a love so great that all those things are true. Jesus is the only begotten, beloved Son of the Father, but sentenced to death by that same Father so that sinners could be saved. The Father's love is so great that though well-pleased with Jesus He would send him to the sufferings of hell so that you and I would never have to experience it. That says a lot. That says it all.

The Lord then makes it clear that He wants the sense of hearing to continue to be employed. The verb form here means, "Keep on listening to Him." Use those ears to listen and absorb what Jesus has to say for in Him is life. Jesus proclaims Himself not only as the sacrificial Lamb, but also as the Good Shepherd. He indicates clearly that He is the Vine which sustains life in the branches. He clearly states that in Holy Communion we will receive His body and blood.

It would seem to be common sense that we would want to listen to Jesus and His life-giving words. Yet we are in a day to day battle with a temptation to listen to other words - words which would put Jesus on the back burner. We are tempted to think of Christianity as our parents' religion without making it our own. We might have "itching ears" as stated in Timothy, that desire to hear about a different way of salvation that is not pure grace. Yes, remember the words of the Father and keep on listening to the words of your Savior.

3. Feel courage in Christ's gentle touch

Even though I've studied this account on an annual basis for many years, it didn't strike me until this time that another sense was involved, namely the sense of touch. It was interesting to me that

Jesus didn't just say, "Get up." But we read in verse 7, *But Jesus came and **touched** them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."*

As true Man Jesus knew full well the power of human touch. He used it at various times in His ministry when He healed people, or on the occasion when He took the children up in His arms and blessed them. This touch was not necessary for a miracle to be done, but as here in our text, it is an example that Jesus knows just what is needed and provides it.

He brought those three disciples up the Mount of Transfiguration because they needed to see this. Yes, it would not be until after His resurrection that others would be aware of it, because evidently they were not ready to hear it, but these three needed to see Jesus in His glory. Consider the view that they would have. Jesus would be beaten and bloodied. He would appear to helpless. It would appear that the enemies of Christ had the upper hand. However, knowing what had they witnessed with their eyes and ears the disciples would know a) that Jesus could have called a halt to the proceedings at any time. He went to the cross willingly; and b) the One that died on the cross was not just true Man. That was the Son of God being sacrificed, and that was a sacrifice effective enough to pay for sins.

They had that fix of glory because it was what they needed, and Jesus still works the same way today. He knows that we're at war. There is a spiritual war of terror going on. Satan wishes to place doubt in your mind concerning your salvation. He wants you to focus inwardly to see your shortcomings rather than focusing on the glory of Christ.

There is deception going on as the prince of this world paints a picture of the greatest glory being earthly fame, power, and treasure. Jesus gives us what we need as through eyes and ears of faith we see true glory and greatness in our Creator and Redeemer.

Feel the touch of Jesus through faith being confident that He will give you what you need in the right measure and at the right time. Have courage in His glory knowing that He used that greatness to provide you with life everlasting. That glory is on your side, and He promises you true glory with Him in heaven. It is a glory that will not fade away, and we can say with Peter, *Lord, it is good for us to be here.* Amen.