

Sermon for: Transfiguration Sunday—Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

February 9—Transfiguration of our Lord

Text: Mark 9:2-9 (Transfiguration of Jesus)

Sermon Title/Theme: "I See the Mountains"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

My wife, Diane, grew up in Denver, Colorado. Our family was blessed to make frequent trips to Colorado to see family and experience the Rocky Mountains. Driving southwest down the Interstate 76 through eastern Colorado it became a contest among our children as to who could first catch a glimpse of the mountain range to the west. "I see the mountains" was the excited call from the back seats of the family van.

Relax in your pew this last Saturday of the Epiphany season to travel on an adventure beyond the rolling hills of western Iowa and glance Word-ward to see the significance of several mountains peaks in our Biblical view. May each of us be blessed to exclaim, "I see the mountains."

See Mount Sinai

As they began their journey to the Promised Land, the children of Israel came upon Mount Sinai. By many standards the mountain was not physically imposing. However as God came to the mountain, the book of Exodus (chapter 19) tells us "there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. . . Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire." On this mountain God appeared to Moses giving him the Ten Commandments.

We continue to see Mount Sinai and the tablet of law which remind us of God's desire for a perfect relationship with Him and each other. As we see Mount Sinai we are reminded of our failure to keep God's Law and our need for a Savior.

God continued to be faithful to His people remembering His covenant with them. During this Epiphany season we have seen God's promise fulfilled in Jesus who through His miracles and teaching revealed Himself as the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus' earthly ministry is about to conclude as He comes to the Mount of Transfiguration.

See the Mount of Transfiguration!

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all share this significant event. Jesus assembled the inner circle of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, as He "led them up at a high mountain by themselves." Mark, inspired by the Spirit, shares the experience from Peter's perspective. Jesus is "transfigured"—"his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them." Matthew adds, "His face shone like the sun." Words cannot adequately describe what the disciples saw. The God from whom Moses had to turn his face; the God in whose presence Isaiah, responded, "Woe is me;" the God whom John experienced on the Island of Patmos whose, "hairs of his head were white like wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bone refined in a furnace," that God now shows His deity to the three disciples. Jesus who had gone up to the high mountain as their teacher and leader, now unveils the fullness of His glory to the disciples and us. He is true God!

Jesus demonstrates that He is the fulfillment of all of Scripture as prophets Moses and Elijah stand with Him. Moses and Elijah by their presence put in view even more distant but Biblically significant mountains of Sinai and Carmel. The Mount of Transfiguration is more than a prominent peak. It is part of the whole range of Old Testament history pointing to the coming of the Messiah.

As if the visual revelation was not sufficient, the verbal affirmation is given, "This is my beloved Son." In his epistle (2 Peter 3:16-17), Peter shares the significance of the Transfiguration for himself and the church. "We did not follow cleverly devised myths. . . We were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Peter

describes hearing the voice of the Father announcing His beloved Son and being in the majestic glory of God's presence.

Through the Christmas and Epiphany seasons we have met Jesus as the Babe visited by Wise Men, the twelve year old in the temple, the miracle worker, and the teacher. Lest we limit Jesus to an interesting historical figure, God's Word takes us to the Mountain of Transfiguration where we get a glimpse of the full deity and glory of Jesus. We are humbled in the presence of the transfigured Lord. We are unworthy to be in His presence. He is holy. We are sinful. God in His grace places another mountain in our view.

See Mount Calvary!

We see in the distance the Mount of Calvary. To look at the story of salvation is not as simple as seeing a hazy formation of mountain peaks. Mount Calvary is thematically both before and behind the Mount of Transfiguration. The cross of Jesus as the mission of Jesus summarizes all that is before the Transfiguration and all of Jesus' ministry that follows.

Immediately prior to the Transfiguration event is Jesus' instruction to His disciples, "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priest and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." The disciples, especially Peter, object, and Jesus goes on to clarify His mission and what would be their calling to bear the cross following Him.

Following the Transfiguration Jesus directs His disciples to tell no one about the event "until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." Nothing was to distract from or disrupt Jesus' journey to the cross. Jesus goes from the mountain of glory to the valley of suffering and to the mount of crucifixion.

To see the glorified Son of God on the Mount of Transfiguration is to see only part of the mountain range of Scripture. Only as we follow Him to the cross do we see the full story and the culmination of our salvation. It was only as the centurion saw Jesus suspended between heaven and earth on the cross and the voice of Jesus proclaims "It is finished," that he was able to confess, "Truly this was the Son of

God.” This Wednesday another Lenten journey begins. Jesus’ invitation is summarized in the hymn, “Come to Calvary’s holy mountain sinners, ruined by the fall.”

Mount Calvary becomes significant only as we see the cross on the mountain. Sadly we sometimes see crosses planted along the road often in remembrance of someone whose life ended at that location. A cross is planted on Mount Calvary. It is a crude cross. On that cross the Son of God, the one glorified in the Transfiguration, is crucified. Jesus, true man, takes on human flesh. He takes upon Himself the sins of the world. He takes upon Himself your sins and mine. All of us who saw our disobedience at Mount Sinai and our unworthiness at the Mount of Transfiguration see God’s response on Mount Calvary. Through Jesus’ all-sufficient sacrifice we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

See the Mountain of Glory—Mount Zion

Because Jesus walked up to Mount Calvary on Good Friday to suffer and die; because He arose again on Easter Sunday, we are blessed to experience another mountain. The Apostle John shares his vision in the book of Revelation. “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb . . . I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters . . . The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing their harps and they were singing a new song. . . These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb.” (Rev. 14). “He carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God having the glory of God,” (Rev. 21).

Even though my wife grew up near the mountains, she doesn’t particularly enjoy curvy roads, the sharp drop-offs, or the thin air of the mountains. John pictures a mountain that all faith travelers will experience and enjoy. There will be no more life altering curves. There will be no dangers or disappointments. There will be only the view of transfigured Jesus on the throne of glory. There will be the view of the Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah, and the saints who have journeyed in faith.

It's one thing to enjoy mountain views from a distance. It's another to put on the hiking boots and experience the journey, to walk up the winding path, to climb over a few boulders, to travel across a stream. Sometimes the journey isn't easy. The higher climb, the thinner the air and the heavier the breathing. A mountain hike may be physically and mentally challenging.

Having climbed the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and three disciples, we now start the climb up Mount Calvary. It will be a six week "hike." It's a long 40 day journey.

I invite you to prepare in personal prayer and devotional life. As I have shared, there are special devotional materials available for you. We will start a special Bible study series next week.

I invite you to prepare through worship. Our Saturday afternoon services will have a journey theme. Our Wednesday evening services will provide a guide to the cross and a guide for our life as Jesus' followers. Our worship is an opportunity to "hike" to the cross together. A hike is more fulfilling and safer if it's done with others. Worship is our journey together to the cross.

May each of us continue to say, "I see the mountains" of God's salvation story. In faith, may we personally and jointly experience them, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep us in true faith until life everlasting. Amen.