

***Matthew 17:1-9. After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." <sup>8</sup> When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."***

***It is good for us to be here.***

- ***To be reassured***
- ***To be refocused***
- ***To be renewed***

It must have been a rough week for Peter. Have you ever made a mistake on Monday and then you just thought about it and stewed on it for the whole rest of the week? Perhaps that was going on in Peter's head in our lesson for today. Our lesson for today tells us that *after six days* Jesus went with Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. And so if we take that cue and back up six days, we end up in Matthew 16 as we recall a humbling event that must have weighed heavily on the heart of Peter. After all, just six days before this, Jesus had called Peter, Satan. That is not a term that Jesus would throw around lightly. But that was the very title that Jesus gave to Peter. Remember how that came about. Jesus had begun to really emphasize the teaching of his suffering and death, as he explained to his disciples; how he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders the chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. When Peter heard this, he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. ***"Never, Lord!" "This shall never happen to you."*** And that is when Jesus turned and said to Peter, ***"Get behind me, Satan!" You are a stumbling block to***

***me, you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men (Matthew 16:22-23).*** And then Jesus used this as a teaching tool for all of the disciples.

That must have stung so terribly. How Peter's heart must have sunk and how that must have gnawed at him over the span of that week! And so just six days after that it must have been an uplifting gesture that the Lord would still include Peter with James and John as they went up on a high mountain on this special trip with Jesus.

And then when they arrived something utterly remarkable happened. There Jesus was transfigured before them. The hidden glory of Jesus was revealed in wondrous splendor. This hidden glory had been hinted at in short bursts in his miracles and the miracles surrounded his life, but now his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as the light. It was clear that he was the fullness of God in bodily form. And it was as if heaven was peeled open as Jesus was seen in this divine glory and then appearing at his side was Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about his departure.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him because this was a time of reassurance and preparation for Peter and the disciples, but it was also a time of reassurance and preparation for Jesus. Moses and Elijah, two great prophets of the Old Testament, were talking to Jesus as he prepared to carry out the work of salvation that God had promised since the beginning. Something big was happening, and it would be tremendously difficult, and it would cost Jesus great suffering. The Son of God was going off to war and words of blessing and reassurance were not only given by God's prophets, but also by the Father himself. Just as the Father spoke a word of blessing over Jesus, before he went out to take on the devil and to publicly preach and teach now the Father speaks out again, as Jesus was preparing to take on that critical final act of his earthly ministry. As Jesus had now set his face like flint to Jerusalem, as he was preparing to undergo all the terrible things that he told his disciples were going to happen, he is reassured of the Father's love and blessing. ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"***

Those words were of great blessing and of utmost importance for Jesus and for Peter and the disciples, as well. Before these words are spoken, Peter, who was often quick to speak before thinking things entirely through, made a comment that he would later wish to take back. He knew the moment was special but expressed a desire to prolong a moment that wasn't designed to last. And so six days after one crushing blunder Peter seems to stick his foot in his mouth again. ***"Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*** The Gospel of Mark includes insight into Peter's

thinking - that he wasn't thinking. It seemed that Peter would admit to Mark, and others, that he didn't know what he was saying, they were just so terrified.

Maybe Peter was trying to make up for his moment six days ago. Looking for a chance to right his wrong, maybe he wanted to do something to get back into Jesus' good graces. Maybe he had in mind some sort of earthly reward, or he would just enjoy this moment in the sun, regardless, he stumbled again. Thankfully the voice of the Father came with the cloud that surrounded them and the Father interrupted Peter's misguided attempt and once more God gave that wonderful declaration and directive that the disciples would do well to pay attention to. ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"***

These are words that we would do well to hear and to take to heart. As we go about our daily lives there are certainly times that we say and do things that we regret. As we follow Jesus, we may lose sight of the things of God and focus too much on the things of men. We might be misguided in our sinful thoughts, and words, and actions. We might even become a stumbling block to others, even if what we said or did was with good intentions. As Peter selfishly voiced his opinions that were contrary to the will of God and to the detriment of the other disciples, we too might be carried away by our thoughts, our feelings, our emotions, and we might speak or act in a way that harms others. And then burdened by the regret of such mistakes we might attempt to "fix" things with God and we only make it worse.

What Peter must have felt as he cowered in fear of the LORD? Not only was he terrified by the voice of the Almighty, but once again he was unable to speak or act like the disciple that he wanted to be. Of course, after this event on the mountain, and as Jesus is handed over into the hands of evil men, Peter would continue to bumble about in his inability to listen and act as a follower of Jesus. When Jesus gives himself over in the Garden of Gethsemane Peter acts without thinking and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. In the courtyard he would deny even knowing Jesus, going as far as calling curses down on himself. It becomes clear that Peter couldn't ever seem to right his wrongs, instead he often just made things worse.

I think each one of us has "been there" and we have been in that spot often. Unable to fix things, or right our wrongs, struggling to follow, stumbling in our faith, saying the wrong things, we bow in terror and uncertainty knowing that we are sinners who cannot appease a holy God. And yet as undeserving or unworthy or inept as we feel, it is God who interrupts our sinful blunderings as only he can. The voice from heaven reminds us of God's love, and his plan, and his will for our lives. ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"***

And then look at what happens next. After the voice of the Father gives this awesome declaration and directive, Jesus comes near. He approaches Peter, and James, and John, and with a reassuring touch and few simple words he delivers a message that is powerful in its own right, ***They fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."*** And this incredible scene continues with these incredibly poignant words: ***8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.***

Be reassured of God's love in Christ Jesus, be renewed as you follow him in faith, and refocus your eyes on the one who willingly sets aside his glory to save you. As we head down this mountain of transfiguration and as we head toward Calvary keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Listen to him. He is the Son of God who goes to war, to win the victory for you. He is the Son of Man, who would suffer horrible things at the hands of the chief priests, and leaders of the people, who would be crucified on a Roman cross, and die in agony and shame for you. He stands in glory on the holy mountain, but he chose to leave that for our sake. Jesus was not just an earthly teacher, who by some sad series of events met an unfortunate end like others have throughout history. No, this Jesus is the only Son of God, who even though he is eternal and powerful and holy like no other, he sets aside his glory to take on our shame and our punishment and our sin, so that we might dwell in glory with Him and with Moses, Elijah, and all who believe in the promises of our faithful Lord. This is the Jesus who resisted every temptation, who endured horrible pain and stayed the course, to right our wrongs, to pay for our sins and give us peace.

It was good for Jesus and his disciples to be on that holy mountain, but they couldn't stay there, Jesus had work to do. He had a battle to endure, he had a victory to secure. And the one who goes to the cross for us is the same one who still comes near to us today. He comes near with his gracious touch in the sacraments and with words of blessed assurance, he encourages us to "get up", "don't be afraid".

It is indeed good for us to be here, as the Lord supplies this special reassurance to Jesus we too are strengthened. As Peter's eyes are lifted from his own sin and trembling, we too have our eyes refocused on Jesus and the saving work he came to perfectly accomplish. And as Jesus and his disciples are prepared and renewed for the journey to the cross, we too are prepared and renewed to follow God's beloved Son to the cross, to the empty tomb, all the way to the heaven he has gifted us.

Let us listen to Jesus, who comes near in love to forgive and restore us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the Holy Son of God who willingly sets aside his glory to save us. Amen.