

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Have you ever taken a long drive across country? It's fun for a couple of hours, but pretty soon the monotony of the road kicks in and you just wish you were at your destination already... About that time, I start watching for signs and billboards. They help me stay focused and give me a foretaste of what's coming ahead. I'll never forget our family drive across country when we moved from San Antonio Texas to Anchorage Alaska. Along the way, we kept seeing these signs



for Wall Drug Store (SLIDE) and they seemed pretty proud of the fact that they offered free ice. Then there was the trip heading south along the east



coast. The famous signs for Pedro's South of the Border (SLIDE) kept our interest going. On the surface this story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is sort of like one of those billboards that reveal what's ahead. Peter, James, John,

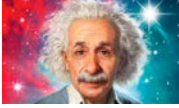



and all of us are given this billboard sign (SLIDE) showing us exactly who this Jesus is and revealing what's ahead. From the time Jesus came down


from that mountain top experience, he knew exactly where he was headed and what lay ahead. Luke tells us Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.



I said on the surface this story was like a billboard, pointing Jesus and all of his followers ever since then toward Jerusalem and the event that took place there, but when you take a closer look at the events on that mountain top it reveals so much more about Jesus and where He fits into God's plan for creation. At this point in the journey of His ministry, Jesus has already chosen his disciples, even his inner circle, and they have already gone out, into the towns healing the sick and preaching the Good News that God's Kingdom has come near. Then, about 8 days before this transfiguration experience Jesus revealed to them this plan to go to Jerusalem where he would be betrayed, beaten, crucified and on the third day he would be raised from the dead. Peter rebuked Jesus and said God forbid such a thing to which Jesus replied, "Get behind me Satan!" As we pick up the story today, it's been 8 days of awkward silence. Luke records no other stories, no dialog, no healing, no preaching or teaching... I believe that's why Peter was taken up that mountain to witness this Theophany. I admit, I have no idea why James and John were also taken up the mountain, perhaps they sided with Peter in rejecting any thoughts of Jesus being crucified... No matter why they were there, it seems pretty clear what God wanted Peter, James, and John to know and through them also for us to understand, well, something...


Through their sleepy eyes, Peter, James, and John see Jesus glowing white, as bright as a flash of lightening. Jesus isn't alone, he's talking with Moses and Elijah. Now at this point I have to stop and ask what about these two figures from the Old Testament would be so significant as to be brought down to earth from heaven... Some ordinary people become so famous they actually become larger than life. Their images become the face of the thing they represent. Here's what I

mean. Take Albert Einstein for example  (SLIDE). When you see his face you immediately think of science, genius, mathematics, and maybe even the poster boy for what it looks like to have a bad hair day. Or take LeBron James as

another example  (SLIDE). He's arguably, the face of the NBA. It's

the same with Moses and Elijah. Moses is the face of the Law 

 (SLIDE) and Elijah the face of the Prophets  (SLIDE). These two, larger than life figures are conspiring with Jesus regarding the plan for Jesus'

“departure.”  (SLIDE) The word translated as departure in the Greek is the

word exodus. I don't think it was by accident Luke used that specific word. He wants us to remember how Moses led the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, into the freedom of the promised land. At the same time the iconic figure of Elijah is meant to remind us of the many times the prophets were sent by God, not to reveal the future, but to be the mouthpiece of God, calling God's people to repent from worshipping false gods like Baal.

So, picture the scene... There's the two biggest icons of the Jewish faith, Moses, representing the Law of God and Elijah, representing God's continuing voice in the world having a high level meeting with Jesus, the Messiah of God, who is about to become the face of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. All three are reviewing and discussing the plan to begin the trip to Jerusalem where Jesus will lead all of God's people from our bondage to sin and death into the freedom of living in the Kingdom of God.

Another thing I learned from this Transfiguration Story is that even when you don't like what Jesus is saying or where he is heading, God, the Almighty Creator of the Universe, wants us to listen to Him. This isn't your mom or Dad, or a schoolteacher, or even your Pastor telling you to listen to Jesus, this is none other than the Big Guy Himself. It can't come from any higher source. This order comes all the way from the top! Peter, and perhaps James and John didn't like the choices and decisions Jesus was about to make and Peter said so directly to Jesus.

Here God doesn't use an intermediary to speak, but comes down in the form of a cloud and tells us plainly and directly, "This is my Son. Listen to Him!"

So, what exactly are we supposed to listen to? What did Jesus say and do while he was alive that was so earth shattering? I can't tell you everything in this short sermon, but you all have Bibles. Some of them even make it easy to figure out what Jesus said by printing all the words of Jesus in red ink. Here's a short synopsis... Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God here on earth. His life and in his ministry taught and showed us what that means. In God's Kingdom being angry and calling someone a fool is equivalent to murder. In God's Kingdom people take care of people. There will be no more rich people stepping over the wretched poor Lazarus on their door stoops. In the Kingdom of God, evil is repaid with good and weapons of war are turned into garden tools. It's pretty simple stuff, but oh, so, hard to do!

I sometimes wonder if Christians even still long for the Kingdom of God to reign in the here and now? I mean, we love to claim America is a Christian nation, but we're the first ones to want to retaliate when an enemy strikes us or our "National Interests." Aren't Christians supposed to turn the other cheek? I know national security is complicated and we do have the right to defend ourselves, this just shows us how huge and terrifying the real enemy really is. We don't want to die... I'm sure Jesus didn't want to die either. I'll bet Peter didn't wish for his

own upside-down crucifixion, nor James to be beheaded, nor John to spend his last days exiled to a small island called Patmos. Yet, Jesus called them and us to pick up our own Cross and follow Him.

This Transfiguration story was thought to be so important and profound to the early Church they included it in 3 of the 4 Gospels. It's meant for us and for all people who ever heard or read this story over the millennia as both a sign, pointing to the Glory of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ who is God's Son. It's also meant to be an encouragement to those who do take up their Cross and follow Jesus. Yes, indeed this is God's plan and Jesus is the one we are to listen to and the one we are to follow. For some sceptics we need to hear that message from God himself. For all of us who need to know that when following Jesus hurts and might even get us killed we're doing the right thing. This story encourages us to follow Jesus back down that mountain where all of life's dirtiness lives and thrives. Down into the valleys where disease, sin, and death still rule the day. We go back, like Jesus changed and transfigured. Maybe we're not glow in the dark disciples, but when we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we are transformed into what Luther called "little Christs" for our neighbors. We go back to our lives and ministries encouraged and reminded to keep on trying our best to walk in the Kingdom of God as Jesus did. Maybe we need the reminder that Jesus disciples needed that Jesus is the Way and

the Truth, and the Life. Only with Jesus can we hope to see God's Kingdom come here as it is in heaven.

May your life have many highs that help you get through the lows. May we all pay more attention to the signposts and billboards God places in our lives to help remind us the Kingdom of God comes to earth in the way we live our lives. May you gladly take up your Cross and as we enter the Season of Lent this week follow Jesus and set our faces to Jerusalem. Most of all, may your life reflect all Glory and Honor to our Father, to Our Savior, and to the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, and equips us for our journey. Amen.