

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 26, 2006

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Last Sunday after Epiphany

Mark 9:2-9

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 2 Kings 2:1-12a

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 148

Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Gospel: Mark 9:2-9

It is Good, Lord, to be Here

Wherever you go, there you are, right? That's a pretty true statement, I suppose. This last week, a number of times when somebody would be looking for someone who wasn't around they would say, "Do you know where so and so is?" They would say that they think he is here. Sometimes we don't know exactly where we are no matter where we go. Sometimes you and I go through life knowing where we are but not knowing exactly what that means or what the entails. This morning we know we are here in church. We are surrounded by the same stained-glass windows. We are in front of the same altar. We are sitting on the same benches. We are hearing the same organ, but do we know where we are?

Do we know why we can say "It is good, Lord, to be here"? Do we know why when we leave this place and go somewhere else we can say, "It is good, Lord, to be here"? Can you understand though why Peter was saying it? Seeing Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus, seeing Jesus transfigured, seeing his glory shining through—you can just see the gospel writers searching for words trying to describe what they saw.

...clothes...whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.—other gospel writers saying, "shining in brilliance like lightning", trying to describe the indescribable. You can understand why they said, "It is good, Lord to be here," but what about us?

It is always good to be where God is, I suppose you would say, and people have known that since the beginning of time. Since the beginning of time, after the fall into sin, people realized that they were separated from God. They had to do something to get together with God because that is a good place to be. If we are right with God, things are good. Since the fall into sin, I think there have been three basic ways a lot of people have tried to get into God's presence—by their actions, by their understanding and through their emotions.

By their actions—perfectionism—"I am going to do everything right. I am going to do my best and then God will have to love me because I have done so much and done so well." That lasts for a little while, doesn't it, until we screw up and we see we are not perfect. We are never going to be perfect. Every time we fail, our conscience is screaming at us that we can't be right with God.

By their understanding—knowledge—seeking some greater knowledge, some hidden knowledge, some new philosophy—philosophies, though, come and go, don't they? Different philosophies have always been there—different kinds of knowledge—but they

pass like a fad. They come and go like the seasons. They change like the weather. It really shows us how short our understanding of how we can be in that good place with our God is going to be.

By their emotions—some people talk about their experience of their feeling of God—“I could feel God as I walked with him in the garden. I could sense his presence and I knew that was a good place because of what I felt.” Up in Toronto there was a whole movement based on emotion. The Holy Spirit was present when they all broke into uncontrollable laughter. That sounds like a T.V. sitcom to me. It doesn’t sound like the Holy Spirit. Think of how fickle your emotions are. How many different emotions have you gone through this morning already just to get here? Did you have to give anyone a good swift “encouragement” to get going so that you could get here in time? Did your emotions go up and down a little bit? As you sit here, what are your emotions like? Did you hear a child in the back, did you hear someone beside you—maybe they are starting to snore already—who knows? Are your emotions teetering toward boredom?

Emotions are roller coasters. They go up and down. Are you going to base your “It is good, Lord, to be here” only on your feelings? Boy, I don’t know, but I hope not. It does feel good to be where the Lord is, but if I am going to just evaluate where God is on the basis of my emotions, wherever I go, I might not be there.

It is good, Lord, to be here. Peter could say that not based on his knowledge, not based on his emotions, not based on his efforts, but it was good Lord to be there on the mount of transfiguration because it probably crystallized things for them—for Peter, James and John. It probably crystallized what they had been doing the last few years following this Jesus, this teacher, going to celebrations with him. They had been to wedding banquets with him. They had ridden in boats with him. They had eaten with him. They had drank with him. They had walked with him. They had slept out in the countryside. They had slept in people’s homes. They had been all over with him. Think of how familiar they were with Jesus. It would be like you seeing your brother. You are used to seeing him, what he looks like. Think about it, now all of a sudden up on the mountain, here comes two dead guys and they start talking with them.

This Jesus who you knew was the Messiah, now all of a sudden you realize the depth of what that entails. He is not just the man that you ate with and that you drank with. He is not the man that you went to parties with. He is true God from all eternity because all of a sudden his full glory is revealed right there in front of you. You, as a sinner, drop and your nose breathes in dirt as you are laying there on the ground because you recognize that you are in the presence of almighty God from all eternity. Sure you might have had head knowledge of it before, but now it is right there in your face and you can see it. You are in the presence of God. Some of God’s prophets from ages past are standing there, and they are talking with him about what that man, who you know, and that God, that you see, is about to do. He is going to go to Jerusalem. He had told you he is going to die, and you don’t get it, but you are seeing it, and it starts to click.

This is the God of Lent. The God of Lent is the holy, almighty, glorious God of all times. He is the God through whom all things were created. He is the God who knows our every thought, word and action. He sees us for what we are. He knows when our

emotions are going in ways they shouldn't. He knows when our understanding is going in ways it shouldn't. He knows when our actions have been living in places they shouldn't and yet, he came and hid his divine nature underneath being Jesus—being true God and true man at the same time. Hidden God was among them in a very real sense. They had seen glimpses of his divinity in his miracles, but they were standing there seeing it in its full glory and they needed to know, this is the God of Lent. Lent for us might make us think of roosters crowing, nails, thorns, whips, agony, pain and suffering, but we dare never forget the one who is enduring all of that is true God. He has to be true God so that his perfection and that his suffering and death count as ours so that our lives are now hidden in his, so his perfection comes to us and our sins go to him and the punishment of our sins are all placed on him. We need to know that—that it is God who went through this because we need to know that our sins have been taken away. We need to know that we don't need a hidden knowledge. We need the knowledge that is revealed in the Word of God. We don't need to rely on our emotions. We need to rely on God's emotions towards us, which is love—perfect, unwavering, unchanging love that led him to do all of this for us.

Those are the emotions that we need to know and the perfection that we can't have, God gave it to us. It is good, Lord, to be here—right here, right now, because God is among us. God is active through the Word. God comes to us in a very real way in the bread and the wine. At times we might be distracted into not noticing that. Just like they saw Jesus every day, they knew he was the Messiah, but he was still Jesus, the teacher, their friend. God is here among us even as we hear babies cry, as we sit in the same pew that maybe our great grandparents have sat in. God is here among us, not because of who we are, but because of who he is. He comes to us as we have our hurts, as we have our worries, as we have our anxieties, as we have our pains, as we have our doubts—he comes to us and says, "I am here. I, the God of Lent, the full God of all glory, am here. I am here among you. I am here for you. I take away your sins."

That is what we need to remember as we begin the season of Lent this coming week. The God who endures all the suffering that we are going to focus on is the God of all glory of all time, and it is good to be here, because he is here.

Do you ever wonder if God is really there? Do you ever face things in your life that lead you to think "God, where are you? God, I don't sense your presence." Maybe once again we are trying to find God's presence through the wrong means. It is not through our sensing him. It is through his Word and through his Sacraments. He is there. And we need to always remember that he is there among us the same way that the God of Lent caused himself to be heard at the time of Jesus' transfiguration. Because as Moses and Elijah and this glowing Jesus were standing and talking, a voice came from among the cloud that enveloped them and said, "*This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!*" "*This is my Son, whom I love.*"—I wonder if Peter, James and John remembered that phrase as they heard Jesus cry out, "*My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?*" I wonder if they called that to mind. I imagine not, but I am certain the Holy Spirit led them to see that later—that as Jesus was enduring the very agony of hell, of being separated from God, God was still the God who loved his Son and who loved us and caused his Son to suffer the agony of hell so that we would never be separated from him.

We need to hear the God of Lent to hear that reminder that he loves us at all times and he is pleased with us, because when he looks at you and I, he doesn't see all of those doubts and those worries and those anxieties and those things that doubt his presence or his love—those sins that doubt that God loves us. He doesn't see that. He sees us as washed clean in the blood of Christ. He sees us as perfect and he loves us deeply and perfectly, and he will be with us, because he is well pleased with us because of who Jesus is.

It is good to be in any place that reminds us of that truth, and whenever we come together to worship we don't come with our efforts. We don't come with our emotions or our knowledge. We come with faith that God has given us that Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are present and active and working among us—healing our wounds, comforting our aches, strengthening our weak and feeble faith so that when we walk out the doors and we go back to our everyday life, we can say, "It is good, Lord, to be here." A parent, a child, a spouse, an employer, an employee, whatever we are, "It is good, Lord, to be here" because that is one of the places that we serve the God who loves us perfectly.

Just like they went down from the mountain and went on to serve—a part of that service would be telling others about it after Jesus rose from the dead—so we go to serve. We serve God not just in the offices we hold in the church, but we serve God wherever we are and whatever we are doing because we do it to thank him and to honor him for our salvation.

That is a Scriptural truth. Think about it. It's nice to think about, but it is also scary to think about how often we fail. That is when "It is good, Lord, to be here" as we remind ourselves each and every week that we are poor miserable sinners but that our God, through his life and death, has taken away our sins. Our God, through bread and wine, comes to us with his body and blood and says, "I love you. You are mine." Our God is always going to be with us.

So wherever we go, as we go in faith, there God is—the God who loved us enough to die for us and the God who loved us enough to pour his wrath—not on us—but on himself.