

You Are There!
Matthew 17:1-9
February 26, 2017

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 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.” 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!” When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 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.”

If you were around between 1953 and 1957, and if you or your parents owned a television during that time, you might have watched a weekly program entitled “You Are There.” This show reenacted important historical events and tried to give the viewer the feeling of actually being in that time and place.

This is Transfiguration Sunday and, through the reporting of St Matthew, we have the opportunity to witness a milestone event in the ministry of our Lord. Matthew tells us in detail how Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness the manifestation of the deity of Christ. And in our Epistle reading, Peter remembers the incident by saying: We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Being here in church today, you have an opportunity to relive that event that took place 2000 years ago. Matthew’s account takes our spirits back to that mountain top in Israel. So let’s try to see and hear what those disciples saw and heard and then see if we can apply that to our lives today – because “You are there!”

Matthew tells us that the disciples followed Jesus up a mountain. We aren’t told which mountain because the place itself isn’t important. What is important is the event that took place on that mountain.

(Some Christian churches stress the importance of knowing the exact time and place you were when you first met Jesus – and that’s not all that important. What is important is that you and Jesus have met.)

On that mountain the disciples witnessed, firsthand, Christ, our Lord, in all of his glory. Matthew tells us that Jesus’ face and clothing were so radiant that it was like looking into the sun.

Can you imagine how magnificent it would be to see Christ in all his glory? Can you imagine being so privileged as to have the opportunity to see for yourself the truth of

Jesus Christ? That would mean that you could say with Peter, “*we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*”

Well, let me tell you something. You are that privileged. You have seen the divine glory of Jesus Christ. You’ve seen his glory displayed in two ways.

First, you have been privileged to see the divine glory of Christ in the words of the Gospel. Did you ever wonder why some people read the Bible and see Jesus as just a better than average man, and yet you read the Bible and see the Son of God, the Savior of the world?

You see the Savior in the Gospel because the Holy Spirit is in your heart. Jesus told his disciples: *The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.*

Having God’s Spirit in your heart also allows you to see the glory of Christ in the transformed lives of yourself and others. When God’s presence changes a life, we can see what the world misses. The world sees the change and is glad that person finally got their act together. We see not only the change but also the loving hand of God directing that change.

We see Saul, the persecutor and executor of Christians, change into Paul, the apostle of Christ, taking the message of God’s salvation to the gentile world. We see John Newton, owner / operator of a slave ship in the 1700’s, change into John Newton, the author of the beloved hymn *Amazing Grace*. We see these changes and we understand these changes because we have been privileged to see the glory of Christ revealed.

James, John, and Peter did more than just see, they also heard. The things they witnessed and heard must have sent their minds reeling. They saw Moses and Elijah, both servants of God’s Old Testament Covenant, come to bear witness to the Lord of the New Testament Covenant.

Those disciples listened as Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus’ upcoming exodus. The time when Jesus would leave this world.

Moses once led God’s people on an exodus from the bondage and slavery of Egypt. But the exodus that Jesus would lead would take his people out of bondage and slavery to sin. The disciples also heard, much to their fear and awe, the voice of the *Father announce: This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*

Wouldn’t it be something to hear the prophets of old speak about the mission of our Savior? Wouldn’t it be something to hear the voice of the Father announce that Jesus is his one and only Son?

Well, my friends, we can and we do hear these things. In Scripture and in worship services, we hear the prophets speak to us about God’s Savior for all mankind. We hear

the Father proudly saying: *This is my beloved Son*. And we hear our Savior himself saying: *God so loved the world his sent his only Son*.

The question is, do we listen? Are we listening when the Lord speaks through his Word and through our worship? There used to be some ads on television that promoted the E. F. Hutton investment company. These ads told us that, "When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen." When the Lord speaks, do we listen?

Sometimes we hear something so often that we begin to ignore it. In our house we have a schoolhouse clock that chimes at every hour and every half hour. We've had this clock for so long that I sometimes don't notice when it chimes. I've become deaf to its message of the passing of another hour.

We must always be on guard that we never let ourselves become deaf to God's voice in Scripture and in our worship. We should be like the believers described in the last verse of the old Gospel hymn *I Love to Tell the Story*. The hymn writer says that, "those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest."

For the next six weeks, during the Lenten season, you will have two opportunities each week to hear the Word and worship the Lord. Will you take advantage of all those opportunities? Or will you say to yourself, "I've heard it all before. No point in hearing it again."

The last thing we want to look at are the feelings those disciples must have had as they descended that mountain. When the voice of God came out of the cloud, the disciples froze in fear – and for good reason. It isn't good for a sinful human to stand in the presence of a holy God.

But at the height of their fear, Jesus comes and touches them. It's impossible to even imagine what it must have been like to be touched by someone who has just been revealed to you as the creator of the universe. But all the faithful will one day experience that touch.

After Jesus touches them, he comforts them by telling them: *Get up and don't be afraid*. These men had just witnessed a most awesome sight and Jesus wants them to be assured that everything is all right – everything is as it should be.

No doubt, on the way down the mountain, those three disciples were already discussing the looks that would be on the faces of the other disciples when they told them what they just saw. And, no doubt, they were a little disappointed when Jesus told them to keep his secret until after his resurrection.

Still, John, James, and Peter had to come down that mountain with a joy and a confidence about the future that would have been impossible to describe to their fellow disciples.

The joy and confidence those three experienced is ours today. We share their joy and confidence because we know what was revealed to them. We know that all of Scripture points to our Savior – the Old Testament pointing forward to him and the New Testament pointing back to him.

We know that Jesus is the true Son of God because we have the testimony of eyewitnesses in Scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And because of this, we know we have nothing to fear so our hearts are filled with joy and confidence.

But we have something that those men coming down the mountain with Jesus didn't have. We have the privilege of not having to wait to tell people what we know.

Those disciples were told not to tell what they knew until after Jesus' resurrection. But, now, Jesus has risen. We don't have to wait. We can tell everyone the good news that was made known on the mount of transfiguration.

Not only can we tell the news but we must tell the *news*. *Jesus said: Go and make disciples of all nations*. He didn't just give us permission to spread the Gospel – he mandated that we spread the Gospel. And we can have confidence that what we say is true because we have eyewitnesses to the glory and deity of Christ.

There is a hymn that asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? . . . when they nailed him to the tree? . . . when they laid him in the tomb? . . . when God raised him from the tomb?"

As we look toward the coming Lenten season, we know it will conclude with us standing beside the empty tomb. Therefore, we say with joyful gratitude and a renewed understanding of God's glorious grace, "Yes, we were on the mountain and saw his glory; we walked the *via dolorosa* and saw his love; and we now look into the future with joy and confidence; because WE WERE THERE!