

March 22, 2015

Peter

Peter at the Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-9

Opening words: This is the final sermon in my five-part sermon series on *Peter*. I chose to look at Peter for a simple reason. The amount of information on Peter is impressive. It is hard to look at a single page of the Gospels and not find his name. Within those stories, we see Peter's spiritual progress. During this season of Lent, I hope you are making some spiritual progress too.

When we last left Peter, he had just identified Jesus as the Christ. You remember the story. He had the right word, "Christ", with the wrong meaning. He was looking for that political Christ to lead them away from foreign domination. Jesus was a spiritual Christ who led people to God. Those must have been hard words for Peter to hear. This morning's story must have eased his pain and expanded his understanding. Our Gospel reading for today is Mark 9:2-9. Let me call this message *Peter at the Transfiguration*.

Mark 9:2-9 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

In the year 381 AD Gregory of Nazianzus wrote these words:

He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life.

Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water.

Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King.

Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons.

Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears.

Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world.

Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.

Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.

He knew then what we must never forget. It is all about Jesus. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

This morning we are in the ninth chapter of Mark. According to the text, it is six days after Peter's confession. Jesus is with Peter, James and John. He leads this inner circle to the top of a mountain. Tradition identifies that mountain as Mount Tabor. Logic identifies that high mountain as Mount Hermon. The scriptures do not identify the exact mountain, but they were alone. Then, things begin to change. First, Jesus changes. Verse two tells us Jesus was "transfigured". Verse three tries to explain that term. In my opinion, the words and the experience don't match. Mark takes his best shot at explaining the experience. He says Jesus's clothes turn dazzling white, whiter than any bleach could do. Second, the group changes. Jesus and the inner circle are no longer alone. They are visited by the two greatest characters of the Old Testament. The first one mentioned is Moses, the great law-giver, who represents the old covenant. The second is Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, the restorer of all things (Mk. 9:11-13). Verse four tells us they were talking about Jesus. In Luke's version, it says they were talking about Jesus death (Luke 9:30). It must have been a wonderful experience for the disciples. It appears Peter does not want it to end. He offers to build three shelters. It appears the disciples are just getting their minds around the experience when the final change comes. Once again, without warning, God appears, hidden by a great cloud. His divine voice clarifies all misunderstanding. In verse seven God says, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" And with those words, the experience ends. The only question that remains is, what does this all mean? The answer is clear. Matthew, Mark and Luke include this story for one reason. They want the world to know Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the greatest life that ever lived. In the life of the church, the only thing that really matters is Jesus.

My goal today is to help you appreciate Jesus. Mark's version of the transfiguration does a wonderful job of underscoring the preciousness of Jesus. The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus was sinless. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus was the Son of God. The transfiguration reminds us that Jesus suffered. In just two weeks, we will come here and celebrate Easter. The resurrection does not stand in isolation. So much happened in a few days. In order to truly appreciate the resurrection, you must first appreciate Jesus. That is my goal today. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Jesus was Sinless

Years ago, I told the story of a group of high school boys who were summoned to the principal's office. They hadn't stolen or vandalized anything. They were called to the office because they smelled! They had bad breath and everyone in the school was complaining. In a curious tone, the principle asked why they smelled like onions. The boys were shocked at the question because they didn't know there was a problem. They told their story. It all began with a simple dare. One of the boys dared one of the other boys to eat a raw onion. He did it, so he dared one of the other boys. Soon all the boys were daring one another another. Knowing there might be an odor problem,

they checked one another's breath. Since everyone in the group had eaten a raw onion, everyone thought everyone else smelled fine. That is the story of our time. We think our sins are in check because we are comparing ourselves to other sinners. You are just as much of a sinner as the person sitting next to you, and you have committed fewer sins than the people in the orange jump suits on the news. Never forget that you stink! Stop comparing yourself to other sinners and compare yourself to the sinless one, Jesus!

First, the transfiguration reminds us that Jesus was sinless. Verse 3 in the text says, *"His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."* The dazzling white clothes are symbolic of the purity of Christ. First Peter 2:22 says, *"Christ committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth."* That fact is important because it made Jesus the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus wore a white robe. What color is your robe? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Jesus was the Son of God

If you travel to Springfield, Illinois, you must go the grave of Abraham Lincoln. It is really something. Lincoln was shot on Good Friday, April 14, 1865 in Washington DC. He died a day later. His body was returned home to Springfield using the same route he traveled to Washington when he was elected President. Inside of the tomb are the remains of the President, his wife, Mary Todd, and three of their four sons, Willie, Tad and Eddie. The only one missing from the family grave was their oldest son, Robert. He was the only one of the four who made it to adulthood. Robert is missing at his wife's request. When he died in 1926, his wife, Mary Eunice Harlan, said Robert deserved his own grave because he was exceptional all by himself. He is buried in the Arlington National Cemetery. She was right. Robert was a Harvard-educated lawyer, the Secretary of War for James Garfield and Chester Arthur, and was a successful businessman. Yet, in spite of all these accomplishments, Robert Lincoln will always be remembered for one thing. He was the son of Abraham Lincoln. I hope you never forget it. Jesus was the son of God.

Second, the transfiguration reminds us that Jesus was the Son of God. Verse four says, *"And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus."* Peter is overwhelmed with the experience and wants to make provisions to stay. He offers to construct three booths. He is interrupted by God, who is hidden by a thick cloud. The disciples cannot see God, but they can hear Him. God said, *"This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him."* The disciples would never question Jesus's identity again. They knew, and we must remember, that Jesus was the son of God. Jesus was not just our model or friend, he was the Son of God. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"** That leads us to Mark's third reminder.

Jesus Suffered

One week from today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. It is our annual pilgrimage to remember all the things that Christ endured. You remember the story. Jesus enters into Jerusalem for his final Passover. The disciples knew something big

was going to happen. They were right, but they were wrong. There would be no political revolution. The only things to die were their dreams and Jesus. The Master did everything to infuriate his enemies. He taught at the temple and disrupted their income. By Thursday evening he was arrested. He endured his trial before the Sanhedrin. They found him guilty of blasphemy and sent him to the Roman governor, Pilate. He didn't want to execute Jesus because he had done nothing wrong. However, the crowd insisted. There was no appeal process, so Jesus, the Son of God, was taken directly to the cross. Hollywood has done its best to portray it correctly. It is hard to watch. The nails go into his hands and he is hoisted up in front of a small crowd. They ridicule him as he hangs there in pain. Everyone is relieved when Jesus finally dies. The suffering is over. Jesus, the Son of God, is placed in a tomb. His loved ones were devastated. That Saturday must have been the longest day of their lives. Thank God for Sunday.

Third and finally, the transfiguration reminds us of Jesus's suffering. Verse 9 says, *"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead."* It is good that Mark reminds us of Jesus's suffering, because most people try to ignore it. Do you know of anyone who comes to both Palm Sunday and Easter worship, but doesn't attend a single Holy Week service because it is just too sad? If Jesus's suffering bothers you, say, **"Amen!"**

The transfiguration is important because it reminds us of three things we must remember in the next two weeks. It reminds us that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. It reminds us that Jesus was the Son of God. It reminds us that Jesus suffered for us. It reminds us that it is all about Jesus.

There is an old preaching story about a church who received a new minister. In my stories, all preachers are handsome and intelligent. This story is no different. On his first Sunday, the sanctuary was filled with the curious. The sermon was well thought out and powerfully delivered. The preacher's topic was Jesus. The next week the crowd shrank just a little, but the quality of the sermon remained the same. The preacher's topic was Jesus. The third week, the crowd went back to normal and the preacher talked about Jesus again. The old man who chaired the committee that hired the preacher, grew concerned. He thought the congregation was shrinking because the preacher preached on one topic, Jesus. So he called the new preacher and set up an appointment. He said, Jesus is an excellent topic for a sermon. However, with so many pressing issues in the world today, maybe he could select one of them to address. He suggested global warming or the national debt. The handsome, intelligent preacher listened patiently as the concerned committee chairman thought he had made his point. He looked at the preacher and inquired, "What are you preaching on this week?" The preacher answered, "Jesus!" The committee chairman couldn't believe his ears. He exploded and said, "Good lord, man! Doesn't anything matter to you besides Jesus?" The handsome, intelligent preacher responded, "No!" It isn't just true of that preacher, it is also true of your preacher. The only thing that really matters in any church is Jesus! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**