

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, February 11, 2024
The Transfiguration of our Lord – Mark 9:2-9

Jesus Alone

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory! Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Sunday school teacher begins her lesson about Jesus as the Good Shepherd by asking the children to guess what she describes. “It is fluffy, white and wooly.” “It eats grass and goes ‘ba-aaa.’ Hesitantly a little boy raises his hand, “Teacher, I know the answer must be Jesus, but it sure sounds like a sheep!”

So goes one of the old jokes about how in Sunday School, Bible or Catechism class the answer is nearly always ‘Jesus.’ Now on the one hand, there’s certainly a lesson for us who teach to vary our questions. But there’s also a beautiful truth to be found in this: really, when it comes to the most important questions, the answer is always **Jesus**.

Today’s Gospel doesn’t just tell us, but shows us what we all need most is **Jesus** and **Jesus Alone**.

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain where they were alone by themselves.

Today’s Gospel lesson took place near the end of Jesus’ ministry. Soon He would go up to Jerusalem to suffer betrayal and desertion, the spitting and mocking and the horrors of the cross.

Our loving Savior knew that all this would be hard on His disciples. He knew that **Peter, James, and John** needed encouragement before they faced it. Even though they had followed and learned from Jesus for over three years, they still needed time with **Jesus Alone**.

Isn’t there a lesson there for you and me? Don’t we and our families also need time with **Jesus Alone**? If these three great Apostles did, surely so do we! After all, Jesus has told us clearly that we will face suffering, trial, trouble and temptation while we live in this sinful world. We too need time **alone** with **Jesus** for Him to encourage us and prepare us for such times.

For us, that happens not a mountain, but as Jesus comes to us in His Word. In the promises of the Bible in worship and home devotions, Jesus takes aside to be with Him away

from the distractions and anxieties of this sinfully insane world. Time with **Jesus Alone** in His Word will prepare us for the challenges and tears of life, as well as the blessings and joys.

As He takes us aside in His Word, **Jesus** let us glimpse what He showed these disciples: **There he was transfigured in front of them. His clothes became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them.**

Transfigure means that Jesus' form, how He appeared was completely, radically altered. When He came into this world, the Son of God became truly human and yet remains true God all in one person. As the flesh and blood God the Son, Jesus has the right to shine in such brilliant glory all the time!

But in order to save us, Jesus laid aside the full use of His power and glory that is His right as God. You see, Jesus did not go around with His face glowing or with a halo over his head. The Bible says: **When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him.** In other words, just looking at Him, there is no way you would think He is the Son of God.

But all that changes as a glimpse of His glory as God shines through His human nature and even His clothes shine with other worldly **dazzling** brightness.

Clearly the one who shines with such **majesty**, purity and Holiness is the Lord God. Especially, since the Lord often appeared in similar displays of glory throughout the Old Testament, like we hear about in Ezekiel 1: **Seated on** (the throne) ... **was a figure that looked like a man...and a bright light surrounded him** (1:26-27).

Now understand, Jesus always has this glory as God even when He does not let it be seen. Even as a helpless baby in Bethlehem Jesus has the glory of God. The same is true when He bleeds and dies on the cross. Because He is true God He not only can, but truly does save us!

The same is true today. We do not see Jesus' brilliant glory with our eyes, especially when times are dark and difficult, and yet the fact is **Jesus** is present with His glory and power as God to help and to save you just as He has promised.

These words make that clear: **A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him."**

Here Jesus appears in glory hidden behind flesh and blood. The Father appears in glory hidden in a cloud, as He often did in the Old Testament. The point is clear: Jesus Christ is true God just as the Father is true God. One glorious undivided God, three distinct persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We see here what we say in the Nicene Creed: *God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.*

But what does it all mean? The Father says: “**This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.**” See how He puts the focus on **Jesus Alone**, just as He does throughout the Bible. Only in **Jesus Alone** are we able to see the invisible God. Only through **Jesus Alone** do we know what God thinks and feels about us and wants for us.

Ok, but how do we **Listen to Him**? There is only one way Jesus has promised to speak to you and me right now and that is through the message of the Bible. We listen to Jesus when we hear, read and remember the Scriptures. We listen to Jesus as He speaks to us His Word along with earthly elements in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Another detail from Jesus’ transfiguration teaches us this: **Elijah appeared to them together with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.**

The Holy Spirit used **Moses** to write the first five books of the Bible, which is the foundation of everything else that is said in the Bible, which always points to **Jesus**. Though he wrote no books of the Bible, **Elijah** was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament who served as the model for all prophets who would write books of the Bible.

Not only did **Moses** and the prophets like **Elijah** speak about Jesus, but God even used their lives and actions to teach about who Jesus is and what He would do. **Moses** rescued Israel out of slavery in Egypt. **Jesus** has come to something even greater: to rescue world from slavery to sin, death and hell.

In a time of spiritual darkness, **Elijah** stood on a mountain to call Israel to repentance and to show them who the true God is as glorious fire fell from heaven. **Jesus** has come to do something greater. He shows us who the true God is because He is true God who shines with eth glory of God on a mountaintop. Jesus calls us to repentance, teaching us He is the only one who takes our sin away!

The appearance of **Moses and Elijah** tells us the Christian faith did not begin 2,000 years ago. The Christian faith goes back to the beginning. Every page of the Bible, written by Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament written by Apostles like **Peter** and **John**, all points to Jesus. **Jesus Alone** is the great theme of the Bible! And so, the Bible **Alone** is how we **listen** to God’s Son.

Now could you imagine standing on that mountain top as Jesus shines with the glory and the Father says: **Listen to Him**, but then we respond: ‘No thank you Lord, not right now. Or maybe later, I’ve got more important things to do.’ Or ‘Ok, I’ll listen to Jesus, but not when it’s inconvenient or it might mean I have to give up what *I want*.’

Now that would be ridiculous right?! But isn’t that what we do every time we don’t make time for His Word? Or we show up, but kind of just hear, instead of actually *listening* to the Word and giving it our full attention.

With this book, Christ Himself is present with His all His majesty and the Father tells us: **Listen to Him.** And yet we can be so ho-hum about it. And what is every single sin in thought, word or action, but saying No, Lord, I'm not going to listen what you say, but do what I want instead!

What a horrible insult to this glorious God! What could we deserve for all our sin against the God whom Scripture tells us is a **Consuming Fire** (Dt. 4:24)? His fire ought to fall from heaven and His holy glory burn us up and throw us into undying hell fire.

We have no excuse that will stand. We have sinned. We tremble like **Peter** who did not know what to say **because they were terrified.**

But then it happens, just like that: **They no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus alone.** Just **Jesus Alone – Jesus Alone** - not in bright glory to destroy us as our sins deserve, but Jesus in our flesh and blood come to seek and save the lost, to rescue sinners like you and me. **Jesus alone** comes to be our substitute who did what we did not and lived a life of perfectly listening to God's Word. **Jesus Alone** who makes his holy obedience count as yours and mine.

Jesus alone who does not stay in brilliant glory but hides it again as He does the shocking thing and goes **back down the mountain.** It will be **Jesus Alone** who saves us from all our sinful failures to listen by going up another mountain outside Jerusalem where there stands a cross. There **Jesus Alone** suffers the consuming fire of God's searing judgment that we all earned and **Jesus alone** takes it away in the darkness of Good Friday.

But just as Jesus promised, that will not be the end, for on Easter morning the **Son of Man** will indeed **rise from the dead** as the proof He wins the victory and brings His people to the glory of eternal life that we see **Moses and Elijah** enjoying in our lesson. Moses and Elijah knew dark and difficult days, but now they shine in life and glory unending through **Jesus Alone.**

That's the future you have as God's people no matter how dark or sad today may seem. That is your future because of **Jesus Alone!**

Yes, the old joke is right. The answer truly is **Jesus Alone.**

-What is the key to understanding the Bible? **Jesus Alone.**

-Where do I find meaning, purpose and true identity? **Jesus Alone.**

-How can we be saved? **Jesus Alone.**

-How can I be certain God really loves me no matter how bad things may feel? **Jesus alone.**

-Where will I find the strength to make it through another day, when I feel I just can't? **Jesus alone.**

-Where can I find light in the midst of the darkness, sorrow and pain? **Jesus alone.**

Yes, even when death draws in around us we will not be alone, but **Jesus** will carry you through that final dark valley to the life and glory of the world to come, all through **Jesus Alone.** Amen.

Dear friends, now we are the children of God and... when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Amen.