

The Transfiguration of our Lord [a]

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MATTHEW 17:1-9

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

His face shone like the sun, Matthew tells us. As he stands right in front of Peter, James, and John, they saw him changed right before their eyes.

If that were not enough to intimidate Peter and James and John, then the two prophets are standing in front of them—Moses and Elijah, from centuries earlier, standing with Jesus, speaking with him, talking about what Jesus will undergo—*this* would intimidate any of us.

This Jesus who had brought them up on the mountain, Peter, James, and John must now know, if they didn't already know from his miracles, is also true God from Heaven, creator of all, the One who bestows all life, so that even the prophets Moses and Elijah recognize him as the Lord who sent them forth to speak his word to Israel centuries before.

As the true God from Heaven, he is over every generation, over all eternity, so that even the fact that Moses and Elijah lived on Earth centuries previous, he is over time, and for him to be speaking with Moses and Elijah at the same time he is speaking with Peter, James, and John is just who he is as Creator of all things.

And if all that were not enough to intimidate Peter, James, and John, then, suddenly, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and they heard the voice from the cloud,
"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear him."

They could bear no more. Peter, James, and John fall face down, terrified.

To which, Jesus said,

“Stand up. Do not fear.”

[Matthew 17:7]

There is nothing more terrifying than a sinner standing at the face of Holy God. Peter, James, and John had that right.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is testimony that he is not only over all time, so that he can include Moses and Elijah in a real-time conversation with three men who live centuries later, but also that he is the Creator of time and everything that is found in time.

That cloud above, shining with unexplained light, he created that cloud, and every cloud, and all the things that pertain to clouds, including the rain falling, the water on Earth, the gravity suspending the cloud in its place in the sky, including the light shining from it. And including the three men standing under the cloud, Peter, James, and John, terrified at all they see unfolding around them.

He is over eternity; He created all. Along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, he created it all—if he did not create it, it does not exist.

So Peter, James, and John are right to be terrified. For now they can know that all their sin—their sin that they thought was puny enough it wouldn't show up on God's radar, their shame they tried to keep hidden—all their sin has been against him, this Jesus, standing transfigured in front of them. And they fall face down, terrified.

“Stand up. Do not fear,”

Jesus says.

All this for the purpose of his cross. This same Peter, James, and John will shortly be standing in front of his cross, hearing the crowds insult Jesus, and seeing Jesus shed his blood unto death.

At the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is showing Peter, James, and John that when they will shortly see him hanging on cross, they will be seeing a man who is not just an unfortunate pawn in history, not just some unlucky victim of circumstances that spun out of control, but they will be seeing the Man who is God himself, the Creator of time and history, who has now entered history, so that at the cross, this Man is eternal, infinite God who has come into our earthly history in order to willingly, intentionally, give himself to die on the cross for those he loves. And those he loves include Moses and Elijah, Peter and James and John.

So, *stand up, do not fear*, he says. For that is what his cross is about.

There is nothing more terrifying than a sinner standing at the face of Holy God. This is as true also for you and me.

That's why the sinner wants to hide the sin. That's why we want to think that our sins are not the great sins God is concerned about; they are just puny little sins not big enough to show up on God's radar.

And then Jesus shows up on the Mount of Transfiguration, revealing that he is over all time, and that there is nothing in time that does not pertain to him—and that includes the sins we wanted to think were too puny to concern him.

But Jesus doesn't want us falling down on our faces, terrified. *Stand up, do not fear*, Jesus says, also to us.

For what we are given to see on that mountain of his Transfiguration is not that Jesus is true God and Creator with all power and all holiness; what we are given to see is that he is true God and Creator with all power and holiness *who is on his way to the cross*.

It's about the cross. It's so that when he is hanging on the cross every sinner may know that there hangs God the Son *for me*. For you.

For you. For your benefit, your salvation—every sinner may hear how those words apply personally. He who created our parents, Adam and Eve, who created us in the womb, he who created our neighbor and all we see around us, he is the one on the cross.

Stand up, fear not, he says. Jesus wants you to hear that word. The Father said it on the Mountain: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear him.*"

And the first words Jesus says, *Stand up, fear not*.

Stand up before the face of God my Father, and do not fear him, Jesus is saying.

Stand up knowing that his pleasure is found in me, and I have taken your sins upon myself.

Stand up in my righteousness.

Stand up no longer hiding your sin, no longer trying to argue that it's only puny little sin anyway, no longer trying to cleanse yourself and become a better Christian.

Stand up in no righteousness of your own, but in my righteousness, Jesus is telling us.

Stand up in the confidence that when I baptized you into my cross and my resurrection, I meant it, so that your life is redeemed and you belong to eternal life.

Stand up in the sureness that the sacrifice I gave for you on the cross, I took up and presented to my Father in Heaven on your behalf, so that your sins are forgiven on Earth and in eternity.

Stand up in faith that though you should not sin, when you do sin, you have an Advocate on your behalf—it is me, interceding to my Father for you, and my Father, hearing my intercession, will never turn you away.

Do not fear. Your fear belongs to your life of sin, your life under the Law, your life of trying to justify yourself. But that's your life that I drowned in my promise of Baptism, and now you live before my Father in your life of faith.

Fear not, says Jesus, I forgive you your sins, so you are clean before my Father, and you have nothing to be terrified of.

Fear belongs to our life of flesh.

The ears of faith, though, hear Jesus. It's the Gospel we hear him speaking. The Gospel brings no fear to the sinner. It brings life.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.