

Transfiguration of Our Lord-February 14, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Mark 9:2-9

"It is Good for Us to Be Here"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad



Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sometimes it's good to know when to quit talking. I have some personal experiences that would support this truth. I really believe that this is also Peter's main problem. Throughout the New Testament Peter is remembered for saying the wrong things. I would suggest that Peter should be cut a little slack.

Most often, what first comes out of Peter's mouth makes good sense. It is when he doesn't know when to stop talking that Peter loses his credibility as a disciple and preacher. Today when Peter, James and John witness the transfiguration of Jesus, Peter is correct in saying "It is Good for Us to Be Here."

*One of the stories we remember the most about Peter is that he was the disciple who denied knowing Jesus three times at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. There is no question that Peter does this. However, the story of Peter's denials begins with Jesus declaring to his disciples, "You will **all** become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" Jesus never pinpointed that Peter would be the only to deny knowing Jesus, like he identified Judas as a betrayer. But Peter couldn't keep silent. He had to add something more to what Jesus had already said. While the other disciples might have been thinking the same thing that Peter was about to say, it was Peter who opened his mouth and said, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." That is probably why we remember Peter as the one who denied knowing Jesus.*

One of the next most familiar stories about Peter in scripture was when Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" and then directed the same question specifically to his disciples in saying "Who do you say that I am?". Again, it was outspoken Peter who spoke up before any of the others could get their words in order and replied to Jesus "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God". It was at this moment that Peter was praised by Jesus and that it would be on this very rock-solid confession that Jesus said that he would build his church. Peter's words were perfect for this moment, but once again Peter didn't stop here. Instead, after Jesus congratulates Peter for his response and Jesus goes on to tell his disciples of his upcoming suffering and death, it was Peter who should have remained silent like the other disciples but said "God forbid it Lord! This must never happen to you." And as you remember Jesus rebukes Peter by saying, "Get behind me Satan." Again we more often remember the last words Peter rather than his first.

Maybe more of us are like Peter than we want to admit. Preachers should be reminded of these stories of Peter and know when to say what should be said and also probably more importantly to know to be quiet. A preaching colleague of mine asked if we had a Lenten theme picked for this year. I told him that each of us

*pastors in our round robin rotation among neighboring churches were selecting verses from Isaiah to preach from this year. I told him that I had selected the beginning verses from the 43rd chapter of Isaiah. He told me how he had just heard a funeral sermon using these very verses. I asked him about the sermon to which he replied that it was one of the best funeral sermons that he had ever heard. I had hoped to find a recording of this sermon to use as another resource, but my preacher friend interrupted this idea, by saying that it **was** a great sermon, except for the last sentence. The last thing people heard and unfortunately what they might have remembered. This preacher had laid out the gospel so well throughout the sermon declaring what Jesus had done for this person who had died and then undid everything by putting a word of doubt of what Jesus had promised in his last words. Like Peter, he didn't know when to stop talking.*

I really believe Peter does the same thing in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus which we just heard. There are six people identified in this scripture. We can imagine Peter, James, and John a little distance away from Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. But the only words recorded for us to hear in this account of the transfiguration are from Peter and from the voice from God out of the cloud. Mark also tells us that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus, but these words are not recorded for us to know. But I wonder what Moses would say to Jesus. Would Moses remind Jesus of the fourth commandment of honoring his father and mother when at the age of 12 he stayed in the temple rather than follow them home? Would Moses have Jesus recite the meaning of the third commandment about keeping the sabbath holy so that he would refrain from healing on the sabbath? Or would Moses listen to Jesus say that he now came to fulfill the entire law for everyone by his death and resurrection? And what could Elijah the prophet say about a savior who he said was yet to come, when Jesus might tell him "I am he who you are waiting for?"

Can you imagine the feeling of being one of these three disciples who were singled out to join Jesus on this once in a lifetime mountaintop experience? You can almost imagine the scenery as they scaled the mountain, maybe taking moments along the way to take in the beauty of what they saw. They couldn't help but think about the other disciples who faded out of view as they ascended the mountain. As they ascended the mountain maybe they believed they had been raised to a higher calling than the disciples on the ground. If the scenic view of going up the mountain wasn't amazing enough, what they saw next was beyond description as they saw Jesus' clothes that might have been stained from the hike up the mountain become dazzling white. Then Moses and Elijah, people that had read about or heard about appeared before them. Moses who had also been called up on a mountain by the Lord appeared now on this mountain right before their very eyes. Then, Elijah who was only one of two people recorded in scripture to be taken up into heaven without dying first was also now before them. This had to be an experience which would take your breath away.

I don't think Peter was out of line to say, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here." If Peter had just stopped with these words, Jesus might have just told Peter, "I'm glad you are here too." But in true Peter form, Peter goes on to talk about making three dwellings. He didn't even think about building a place to stay for himself and James and John. As we learn these disciples whose breath was taken away by being in the presence of God were also terrified. And maybe this is why Peter blurted out his building plans for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

A retired professor who publishes weekly studies on these scriptures said that his father-in-law who also was a pastor suggested that it maybe was Peter's plan to establish a seminary on this mountain. Moses would be in one building teaching the law and then students could go to Elijah's building on campus to learn about the prophets and of course Jesus would be teaching classes on the New Testament. We don't read that Jesus rebuked Peter for his building plan. But we do know that the next voice that silenced anything more that Peter would say came from heaven.

This voice didn't say, "That's a great plan Peter. Go get the other disciples so they can attend this campus and learn from them." Nor did the voice say to follow Jesus down the mountain and see what he does and try hard to be like him. Instead, God the Father spoke from the cloud and said, "This is My Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And to make sure that there was no confusion about who God said to listen to, Moses and Elijah are removed from this mountaintop and it is only Jesus left to be heard.

I didn't say it out loud, but I thought about these very words of Peter on July 10th this summer when I woke up early at the spacious cabin where our family stayed for three days on what seemed like a mountaintop experience to me by Lead near Terry Peak. I went outside on the deck early one morning with my cup of coffee by myself and took in the beauty of that place and thought "How Good Lord to be Here".

There is a difference between seeing a picture of something and being there in person to experience it. You cannot see by this picture, the doe that I saw come out of the trees that morning and freely graze without any fear of who was watching her. You cannot hear the different birds that sang that morning that I tried to find in the trees. You cannot feel the fresh air that was so good to breath that morning.

Today, I would have to agree with you watching this service online since it is -18 degrees outside if you were to say, "It is good for us to be here in our homes watching a picture of this worship." But I also know that so many of you long for the day to experience worship in person and to say like Peter, "It is good for us to be here." Amen