

Grace and Peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen. (Titus 1:4)

Luke 9:28-36

This past week people on the east coast were preparing for the worst snowstorm in their recorded history. Grocery stores ran out of milk and other foods, and gas stations even ran out of gas as people stockpiled whatever they could get their hands on. Some families are still living without power after days, but thankfully many were prepared for this act of God. Physical preparation has value for survival. Spiritual preparation is no less important. In fact, it has value in all things. I say this because today we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus and with it, the season of Epiphany comes to a close. We have seen Jesus revealed as the Savior of wise men and on-lookers at the Jordan River. But today we also prepare for the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Lent is the season of the church year when we focus especially on Christ's suffering, his passion. We'll want to ask ourselves, How shall I prepared for this solemn journey? Some people give up chocolate or ice cream for Lent, but our preparation needs to be much deeper. Today, as we meditate upon the Transfiguration, **"Prepare for Jesus' Passion!"**

1. His Glory Shines Supernal, 2. His Words Remain Eternal.

1. His Glory Shines Supernal

Eight days earlier Jesus had been praying privately with his disciples. He had then asked them two questions: Who do people say I am? *and* Who do you say I am? Peter had responded to the second question with gusto: "You are the Christ of God!" (Luke 9:20). Peter had a bold confession of faith in Christ as God's anointed. He showed spiritual maturity, something we hadn't really seen from the disciples thus far.

In response to this confession of faith, Jesus placed before his disciples two situations of suffering. The first was his own, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Jesus responded to the disciples' faith with a promise. He promised he suffer, die and rise again. But that wasn't all. Jesus also said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Not only would Jesus suffer, anyone who wants to follow Jesus and be his disciple—they too will suffer!

The reality of suffering demands we be prepared. Jesus knows his disciples will need strength as they see him on the cross, suffering for the sins of the world. Jesus knows we disciples will need strength as we too experience suffering in this world. It's in this context that Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray yet again.

"As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." Jesus was transfigured before his disciples. His face suddenly changed its look. It was the same face, but a new brilliance had come over him. The brightness and glory were so powerful even his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. The heavenly glory was shining through his clothing. But what's going on? What's this *transfiguration* all about?

Throughout his entire life, Jesus was true God and true man. But if you looked at him, you would think he was just a man not God. Then, there are those times when he revealed a little piece of himself. We call them *miracles*. He told the paralytic, *Rise and walk*, and we saw this Jesus was no average Joe. He told Jairus, *Here's your daughter; she's alive again*, and we knew that no mere man could raise the dead. That's the divine glory Jesus always had, but didn't always show while on earth. Not so today. On the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. **His glory beamed supernal.** He showed his heavenly glory for the disciples to see. He revealed who he was, like at no other time in his earthly life!

Then, the disciples came to their senses and realized what's going on. Before Peter could finish his foolish sentence, a cloud enveloped them. The disciples were terrified as they entered this cloud. For them it was a reminder of another mountain, Mt. Sinai. Peter's foolishness vanished, as he hit the deck in fear and trembling. The disciples were afraid because they realized they were in the presence of the Holy God. The One who created the earth and the heavens was before them. **His glory shone supernal** and they knew it.

What do you think of the disciples' reaction to the cloud? Were they right in being afraid or was it another part of their misguided Peter leadership course? Some people might think they overreacted...but they didn't. Some people might say they were living in a superstitious pre-scientific age, so they were easily excitable...but they weren't. Their fear and trembling were perfectly natural. God's glory is a supernal, heavenly brilliance. It is a testimony to God's unchanging holy standard. The Israelites had the same reaction when God thundered to them from Sinai. They all recognized the facts: God is holy—I am not. God has a standard of perfection; I am not perfect; therefore, there's a problem between me and God. Let's call it a sin problem. Take God seriously and you take sin seriously too.

But our society doesn't tend to take God too seriously. If you can believe whatever you want as long as you're sincere, then who needs God. If God is just an old grandpa up in heaven, laughing at my drunkenness or my temper or my gossip, then who needs a Savior at all. The reality is that small sins become great, when they are regarded as small. The reality is that you and I need a Savior.

Taking sin seriously, as an affront to God's holiness, will only deepen our understanding of his glorious love. **Prepare for Jesus' passion!** Consider the gracious amount of forgiveness we truly need. Then consider how God himself has come. No sin is so great that God is not greater. No problem is so big that God is not bigger. **His glory shines supernal** and he assures us: the One True God fights for his people. Jesus himself goes forth uncomplaining, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. He goes to suffer and to die. Jesus showed us his glory on this mount, so that we would not forget his true identity. In the coming days of Lent, as we look at his suffering, Jesus will not look like the true God shining supernal. No, he will look like a weak human being, the helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control. He is anything but helpless. He is the Mighty God working out your salvation. He makes you and me holy by his own blood. Like Moses and Elijah, we shine with a heavenly brilliance in God's sight—the brilliance of forgiveness.

2. His Words Remain Eternal

Life is a series of ups and downs. We may have high points that we would consider mountain tops, when everything seems crystal clear. We know what we want to do in life and where we need to be going. Family life is running smoothly and the job is paying the bills. You have been in God's Word and you are starting to understand things that didn't seem so clear in the past. Then there are the low points. A lost job, a tough time in school, a difficult friendship gets more difficult, a loved one passes away, and the lows get lower. Nothing seems to run smoothly and no one seems to care. It's for these times, the highs and the lows, that we want to be prepared. To truly be prepared spiritually, let's keep the focus on Christ. **Prepare for His Passion**, look to his cross because **His Words Remain Eternal**.

Jesus had two special guests on this mountain of Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor and they were talking with Jesus. But this wasn't a casual conversation, catching up on the latest news, weather, and sports. Luke tells us, "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." Jesus' words

never change. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. Jesus had promised his disciples eight days before this, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected...and killed and on the third day be raised to life.” This is what he was talking about with Moses and Elijah. Just as angels came and strengthened Jesus in Garden of Gethsemane, so Moses and Elijah come to strengthen him. They were two pillars of the Old Testament. At the beginning of Israel’s history Moses was the leader, lawgiver, and mediator God appointed. Elijah, during the difficult reigns of kings in Israel, was God’s mighty prophet who fought the inroads of idolatry and false worship. They represent the *Law* and the *Prophets* of the Old Testament. They confirm Jesus’ words about who he was and what he was doing.

But even more powerful than any Old Testament figure was the message God the Father spoke, confirming Jesus’ words. The Father said: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!” These words are similar to words we heard last week at Jesus’ Baptism. They’re similar, but did you catch the difference? At Jesus’ baptism God spoke to Jesus, “You are my Son.” Now God speaks to us, “This is my Son.” God the Father has chosen Jesus. Listen to him. You can trust him. He will not lie to you. **His Words Remain Eternal.** Every sentence he speaks and every message he utters come from God. Jesus’ words are God’s own words. Jesus told his disciples, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

You and I live in a world of change. “Change is good for business”; “Change we can believe in”; “Save your spare change”; “Change your habits and be more eco-friendly”; “Change your state of mind”; “Times change, people don’t”; and the quote list goes on... But in a world of change, what Jesus brings us is unchanging. His Word is our Rock in times of trouble. The disciples need the comforting power of God’s Word on that Mount of Transfiguration. They needed it, because it was preparing them for the suffering they were about to witness. Their Lord’s path to the cross would be confusing for them and they needed to know—no matter what happened—Jesus was still telling the truth. Remember what you saw and heard on the mountain. Remember the truth of God’s Word! Because a time may come when things aren’t so clear!

You and I have struggles too. Life has low points and dark valleys. Things we’ve experienced and paths we have yet to walk. We might wonder, “Is God really in control of this?” “Does God really want me to suffer?” “I thought I was part of his family, why is my family going through this?” And the comfort of God’s Word remains eternal in the midst of our change: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). God has a greater glory to be revealed in us and he doesn’t lie to us. His Word is our eternal refuge and strength. Through his gospel we know that “In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

I hope the people on the east coast survive their downpour of snow. We don’t mind sharing a little snow with others, and it gives us a good opportunity to think about preparing for those kinds of disasters. Then we can consider spiritual preparation too. As we look forward to the start of Lent in a few days, let’s keep our focus on the crucified Christ. Our lives change and our earthly struggles may increase, but his glory and his words are our sure defense now and always. AMEN