

Matthew 17:1-9  
The Transfiguration of Our Lord  
February 23, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

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Well, we can't have a text with Peter doing stuff without talking about him. After all, he's our favorite train wreck. We love to watch him put his foot in his mouth and do stupid things. If he were in a TV show he'd be the comic relief. I think a lot of us also like talking about Simon Peter because sometimes we see a little bit of him in ourselves too. We identify with his ups and downs in our own lives.

Just one chapter ago in Matthew, Peter had his bold confession. Jesus had posed a question to the disciples. "Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?" And then another question, "But who do *you* say that I am?" and Peter answered for them. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," he confessed. And in return He received blessings from Jesus. He was given his new name. He was formerly called Simon, and now Peter. But then just a few verses later, as Jesus told them about the salvation plan, how Jesus would go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise, Peter rebuked Jesus. Peter didn't want a salvation plan that would include suffering and death. So, Peter was briefly given another new name. "Get behind me, Satan" Jesus told him.

But even though Peter says and does the wrong things sometimes, Jesus still loves him. He even makes Peter part of the inner three of the disciples—a select group that gets to witness things that the others do not. And that's where we find Peter this morning. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain for something special.

Listen to a few verses again.

**<sup>1</sup>And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>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."**

It starts out with the disciples passively following. Jesus is the agent of action. Then Jesus is transfigured and Moses and Elijah appear. And all three are active while the disciples remain passive, looking on at this amazing sight. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are talking together.

But Peter can't resist. He can't contain himself. He's just too excited. He interrupts the conversation they're having. It's like when your kids were little and something seemed so important to them that they forgot how to be patient. They jump up and down saying "ooh! Mom. Mom. Dad. Mom. Hey, you know what? Mom and Dad, guess what."

Then as Peter is talking about how excited he is and offering to build tents he gets his own interruption. **"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.'"** Man! Peter just got knocked down a peg. His childish interruption was just met with God the Father essentially saying, "shhh! Grownups are speaking."

It's fun to talk about Peter, his ups and his downs. It could even be fun to talk about why Moses and Elijah were there, though probably not as amusing as watching Peter. But this text, this scene is not about them. And it's not about Peter. It's about Jesus. And God the Father made sure that Peter and we all knew it. **"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."**

In our church year we are now wrapping up the season of Epiphany. And the season is framed by that statement about Jesus. It starts at Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove. And it is repeated today when we get a preview of Jesus in His glory. This one. No

other. This one is the Son of God. This is the one you should follow. This is the one you should listen to. So, what was Jesus saying to Moses and Elijah?

Well Matthew's Gospel doesn't tell us—just that they were talking when Peter interrupted them. But if we look at Luke's Gospel it tells us that Jesus was talking with them about His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31). This means that even though He may not have said it specifically, Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about you.

It can be hard for us to wrap our heads around sometimes. We simply can't fathom the knowledge that God has, that Jesus has. We have to be reminded that Jesus is the One by whom all things were created, including you. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the promised prophet, the messiah to come, the beloved Son of God. He is the one whose words calm storms, cast out unclean spirits, make the sick and lame well again, and words that even raise the dead. He is the one with the Words of Eternal Life.

When Jesus was talking about His departure which He was about to accomplish, there is a whole lot more included in that than just His suffering, death, and resurrection. It includes the Fall into sin. It includes all the prophets and leaders before His birth. It includes the restoration of creation that began when He took on our human flesh. It includes all the people He had already healed and would heal. It includes the commands and teachings He had given His disciples. And it included all the times you and I act like Peter—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Sometimes, like Peter, we feel like we need to do something, to say something, when really we should be listening. Jesus is still the one doing all the doing. His words do not return empty. His words accomplish something. He is the one who is making you perfect. We don't feel like it sometimes. We know we aren't perfect yet as we live in this world still waiting for Christ's return and we continue to make mistakes. Sometimes we feel like we need to make up for the mistakes. Sometimes we feel like we need to make a show of how good of a Christian we really are, how faithful we are in attending church and helping others, or how pure our doctrine is. Sometimes with our words or actions we feel like we need to show how much we can serve God. *It is good that we are here, let us make tents. Let us do something. Let us do anything to show how worthy we are to be here in Your presence, Lord!*

Other times, like Peter, we are weighed down by our sin, we stop focusing on Jesus and we look at the winds and waves that are crashing all around us in this world and we start sinking. We feel like we need to confess the same sin over and over again in our hearts as we speak our confession together. All of that extra confessing of the same past sin is doing. All of that is action on our part, when we should remain passive. We should let Jesus continue to be the agent of action. We should listen to Him.

And all the time, like Peter, we do continue to need forgiveness. Like Peter, we fail many times. Sometimes we even deny Christ, maybe not verbally, but through our inaction and silence around others. But again, like Peter, Jesus still loves us. He still gives us His forgiveness. And He gives it often and abundantly. Peter denied knowing Christ 3 times. And his reinstatement was also three-fold as Jesus commanded him to feed His sheep. We also need that continual forgiveness. And we receive it as often as we need it. When we come together to hear the Words of Jesus Christ, we receive His forgiveness. When we come to the rail this morning to receive Him in His sacrament, we receive His forgiveness. It is good for us to be here. And when we go home and we struggle and stumble in our daily life this week, we still have Christ's forgiveness.

Peter wasn't wrong when he said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." It was good, but then he got too focused on doing things rather than just receiving. This morning it is good for us to be here too, not because we are offering God anything, but because here is where He offers *us* His forgiveness. Once again, it is God's activity. We are passive. And He continues to act in your lives bringing you His Word, a word which says **"rise and have no fear,"** a word which **"be still, and know that I am God"** a word which says, **"Neither do I condemn you."** **"Arise and go your way. Your faith has saved you."** Amen.