

Transfiguration A, 2011

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Title: A New View of Jesus

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Today Jesus' disciples see a side of Him they've never seen before.

They've been with Him for three years now. Jesus has done and said some strange things along the way. But He still looks like an ordinary, 30-something guy. If you passed Him on the street, you probably wouldn't notice Him.

But not today. But today, Jesus is changed. Jesus is different. The disciples see a new side of Jesus.

It's hard to even imagine what this experience on the mountain was like for these disciples. Jesus' face and clothing were dazzling white, blinding. It was like looking into the sun.

If you've ever been out driving at night, and a car heading towards you leaves on their high-beam headlights, and as they come towards you are dazzled by the bright, intense light, that's just a taste of what it might have been like to see Jesus transfigured.

The disciples see the true glory of Jesus Christ. They see Jesus in all of His divine majesty.

When Jesus became man, He hid His divinity, His glory in His flesh and blood. Jesus was true God, but most people couldn't see it. They wouldn't know it just by looking at Him.

Jesus was true God, begotten of the Father from eternity. He is of one nature with God the Father- they have the same divine nature.

Jesus was there even before creation. Jesus is no less in power or glory than God the Father. He has the same glory as the Father, since together with the Holy Spirit they are one God.

We often forget this fact. We think of Jesus as something less than true, complete God. But even though Jesus often didn't use His divine glory, it was still there.

Think of a major league baseball player playing out in the back yard with his young son. The boy is pitching and his dad is at bat. As the boy tosses the ball, his father swings gently and taps the ball back to him. Then he jogs slowly to first base, giving the boy a chance to beat him to the base and make the out. The father holds back, because if he used his true strength, it would be too much for the boy, it would be frightening and overwhelming.

Now imagine that same boy when he goes to see his father play in a big league game for the first time. He's sitting there watching his dad in action. When his dad comes up to bat, he sees him

use all the strength and power in his arms and legs as he drives through the ball and sends it flying. He sprints around the bases at top speed and slides in safely.

Imagine the awe and the surprise when the boy sees for the first time what his dad can really do, when he sees and experiences his power and strength for the first time.

When Jesus was here on earth, he was holding back. He was playing the game on the disciples' level. He didn't use all His power and glory, otherwise they would be overwhelmed and frightened by the experience.

But here on this mountain, just this one time, Jesus gives His disciples a taste of His true nature and glory.

They are overwhelmed. They are frightened. They don't know what to do.

Peter suggests putting up a few tents so they can stay there. He's knows that this is a good place. But this experience is too much for him.

Peter is not suggesting they have a campout. A tent is a something that hides, that conceals. He'd rather have Jesus (and the two fellows who have come from heaven) hidden in a tent to shield his eyes from the glory of God. Peter is saying, yes, it's good to be here, but can you take things down a notch, cover up a little bit.

And when the voice from heaven speaks, it is too much for the disciples. They fall on the ground in fear and trembling.

We often long for an expression of the power and glory and majesty of Jesus Christ. We imagine what it would be like if heaven were open and we could see Jesus and hear God the Father.

It would be a good thing, but it would also be terrifying and overwhelming for us.

So Jesus interacts with us gently. In ways that we can understand and relate to.

Peter, in the epistle lesson, talks about his experience on the mount of Transfiguration. He talks about what it was like to see Jesus and the cloud and to hear the voice from heaven.

As impressive and wonderful as that experience was, Peter says that we have something more certain, more sure, than even the voice from heaven.

We have the word of God, the Holy Scriptures, written by the prophets and apostles.

Like Jesus Christ Himself, the words of the Bible seem simple and ordinary. Most people dismiss them as just religious or spiritual writings. But they are much more than that.

St. Peter tells us that the writers of Holy Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They weren't just made up by men, but men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

As we read Holy Scripture, God is speaking to us. We don't have to wait for a voice from heaven. We don't have to rely on hearing God speaking from clouds. That would be too terrifying for us to take.

Instead, God makes Himself accessible to us in Holy Scripture, speaking to us in a hidden way, wearing this mask. Inside this tent.

If you want to hear God speak to you, if you want to know what He has to say, listen to His word. Read His word in your homes and with your families. Take the Lenten devotionals home with you and put them to good use.

Bible Study is another opportunity to listen to Jesus' voice. I wish we had another name for what happens after church. It sounds like its just a class, like what happens in school. What we are doing is gathering together to listen to Jesus and to talk about what He still has to say to us today. God the Father told the disciples from heaven to listen to Jesus. And that's all we're doing.

Finally, listen to Jesus speak to you here in this place. Today Jesus says, "I forgive you. This is my body and blood, given and shed for you." These words are as sure and certain as if heaven opened and the voice thundered down.

Once again Jesus hides Himself. He doesn't appear in big spectacular shows of His glory, but in hidden, humble way. He hides Himself in bread and wine, and a few ordinary words spoken by an ordinary man.

But it will not always be like this.

One day Jesus will return in glory.

The whole world will see the full-blast, full strength Jesus.

To some, it will be terrifying. They will know that they have rejected Him and they won't be happy to see Him.

For us, it will be a joyful experience, because we will be changed to be like Him. St. Paul promises that we will be like Jesus in the resurrection. Now we won't be divine, but we will be pure and sinless and holy. Our bodies will be transformed to be like His resurrection body. That is what awaits you.

Then you will be mature. You will be able to handle the full-blast Jesus and enjoy it. It won't terrify or overwhelm you, but give you comfort and joy.

Today the disciples see a side of Jesus they've never seen before- one of power and majesty and glory.

On Wednesday we enter the season of Lent. In the weeks ahead we will be looking at Jesus. We will be looking at Him from all angles, using the pictures of Jesus given us in God's Word. So come along on Sundays, Wednesdays, too and every day at home, as we look at Jesus, God's beloved Son, with whom He is well-pleased.