

Listen to God's Beloved Son

🕊 **the Prophet of the prophets (vv.2-4)**

🕊 **the Lord of the Church (vv.5-9)**

In the Name of Jesus, our shining Savior, God's beloved Son, dearly loved disciples of our Lord:

Glorious light – have you ever seen it? As a fourth grader, I was leading a friend through the dark forest towering behind our house near the Oregon coast. “I know this forest like the back of my hand,” I had told him. Sure of my directions, I pressed on until I came to a bright opening through the trees. But we could not pass. Black berry bushes blocked out way. The berries are awesome; the thorns are painful. I was lost. Then I heard my older brother Roc calling my name. I never did figure out why he came looking for me that day. I thought I knew the way. Getting lost reminded me how much I need guidance through life. We think we have things all planned out, but only prove we are sheep who love to wander.

Through God's Word and sacraments our Lord Jesus is shepherding His people. Sometimes congregations feel under a cloud, like sheep startled by a storm. But our Good Shepherd walking among His sheep soothes our souls with the sound of His voice. It's just what our dear Father in heaven gives in this classic text for TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY: **Listen to God's Beloved Son.** Jesus is...

🕊 **the Prophet of the prophets (vv.2-4)**

After months of preaching and healing all over Galilee, our Lord Jesus led His disciples far to the north near Caesarea Philippi. Idol worship was rampant there. You can still see near the Jordan River springs of Banias, temples left by ancient Greeks and the Romans that followed them. There Jesus had commended Peter's good confession: ***“You are the Christ.”*** But when Jesus plainly told them He would suffer and die on the cross, they missed the part about Him rising on the third day. Peter actually started arguing with Jesus and received the Lord's rebuke: ***“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men....If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Mark 8:34–37 NIV84)

About a week later ***“Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and led them up a high mountain where they were alone by themselves. There he was transfigured in front of them. ³His clothing became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. ⁴Then Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.”*** (W.P.) ¹ Luke tells us, ***“They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”*** (9:31 NIV84)

We sometimes forget how difficult it was for Jesus to keep going as our Savior. The four Gospel accounts clearly show He knew from the beginning the details of His suffering and death. He wisely waited to tell His disciples, knowing how Peter, the lead disciple, would react. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, most likely Mount Hermon north of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus got the encouragement He needed to press on. Who better to help Him than Moses, God's giver of the Law which shows our sin and our desperate need for a Savior? The great prophet Elijah had pronounced God's judgment so faithfully during hard times. They were reminding Jesus of the big picture: the Shepherd would die for His sheep.

¹ W.P. ~ Wartburg Project – Matthew popular review (w/o footnotes) the Bible text unless stated otherwise. [M.C. 2/15/2015]

If God's own Son needed encouragement like that, isn't it obvious we do too? Who of us has not been shocked and disappointed at our own sin, things we say and do, countless good we leave unsaid and deeds we leave undone? If every sin must be punished by eternal damnation – And that is what God's Law through Moses demanded! – then you and I were lost and condemned before we were born. The Psalmist David, so close to God's own heart, confessed in Psalm 51:5: ***“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”*** (NIV84) We have to admit we are no better than Peter as we blurt out words from fear and confusion. We forget Jesus is **the Prophet of the prophets** whose Word deserves to be the first thing on our hearts every morning and the last at night. But our own opinions try to hide God's Word and our feelings tangle up like brambles. We forget Jesus is...

🕊 **the Lord of the Church (vv.5-9)**

Who of us can blame Peter? We feel this way too: ***Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let's make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”*** ⁶ ***He did not know what to say since they were terrified. “Terrified,”*** yes, and excited to keep that vision of heaven here on earth. Haven't you ever said, “If only I could talk with Jesus about this”? You can – in prayer! And God answers in His Holy Word, the Bible. Peter wanted to camp out with his favorite Teacher shining as God's glorious Son, with the most famous prophets of Israel. Who can blame him?

This is where we are as a congregation. We've just had a mountaintop experience celebrating our first twenty-five years of grace. Remodeled sanctuary and facility, new robes and paraments, upgraded sound and projection system – these great blessings pale in comparison to the return of so many members for our anniversary service last Fall. We'd love to stay on this spiritual high. But what happens if comes of a dear couple who has been such a blessing to us is leaving without explanation? My heart hurts because I love them dearly as friends and fellow Christians. Suddenly all our challenges seem to confront us like a blackberry patch in the daylight. One pastor at conference shared how a dear member left a note and would not respond to any contacts. Yet this is the first time I recall a member taking time to leave a list of things we need to do with him gone. Aren't we right there with Peter? Shall I follow my feelings? Give in to loss and disappointment? Or shall I follow God's Word, **the Lord of the Church**?

A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.” Jesus is **the Lord of the Church**. This little outpost of His kingdom called New Life Lutheran was not built on talented members. It was not built by this pastor. In fact, I constantly pray, “Lord, if you left this all to me, I would bring it crashing down in a heartbeat.”²

“Suddenly when they looked around, they did not see anyone with them, but only Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” At the time they didn't even know what that meant.

It's time for you and me to humbly follow our Savior down the mountain back to the plain. It's time to pick up our cross and follow Him. Let's focus our heart and soul and ***“not see anyone..., but only Jesus.”*** Then we can be thankful for rich blessings past and rejoice in God's present peace. We will meet our believing loved ones again in the glories of God's heaven because our suffering Savior is **the Lord of the Church**. His gracious rule has brought us here; His kindly love will keep us. Let us follow Him in His Passion again this Lenten season...to kneel at the foot of the cross in humble repentance and rise to new life with Him again on His glorious Easter morning. The best is yet to be. ***“For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.”*** (Psalm 48:14 NIV84) Amen.

² Echoing Martin Luther's *Sacristy Prayer* – <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/LutherASacristyPrayer.pdf> .

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