

It Is Good to be Here!

✧ **We love God's glory. (vv.2-6)**

† **The cross beckons. (vv.7-9)**

Passing from Epiphany light into Lenten shadows, dear followers of Christ Jesus our Lord:

“Too much drama!” Ever hear that about someone you know? About your own life? What is it that makes us so fearful when things are good that we sometimes ruin relationships just by fear? Why do we stay in harmful relationships when God always has a better plan, a way out? Must be our human condition. The mildest romantic movies are 95% problems and just a few minutes of hugs and kisses – if that! We're all about problems, but in spiritual things, we all want smooth sailing, bright lights, warm fuzzies. “Don't trouble me with the truth. Tell me lies”? God help us! **It Is Good to be Here!**

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“*Six days*” before our text Jesus had been on a discipleship retreat with the Twelve. He had asked the key question: “*Who do you say I am?*” Peter answered for the rest, “*You are the Christ.*” Jesus commended Peter, but then warned them not to tell anyone about Him. As soon as Jesus began to tell the rest of the story about His suffering, death and resurrection, Peter rebuked Jesus. What stern words came from Jesus on His recently commended disciple: “*Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*” Talk about a downer! Jesus launches into the fact that every single one of His followers must deny himself, pick up his cross and follow. No cross – no Christian. “*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*” (Mark 8:27ff)

One promise came before “*Six days*” of silence: “*I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.*” (9:1 NIV84) Plenty of drama! Plenty of time to think about what lay ahead. Glad to be headed up into the mountains.

Most likely Mount Hermon is where “*Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.*” The brief glimpses of glory which we've seen during the Epiphany season suddenly burst into full glory in Jesus face shining like the sun (Matthew 17:2) and His clothes whiter than any detergent commercial. A taste of heaven!

But there was more. They had never seen these men, only heard about them from the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. There stood the greatest prophet of old, Moses, with the great preacher of ancient Israel, Elijah. The Holy Spirit had inspired Moses to write the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; and Elijah to tear down Baal worship from Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. What were they discussing with Jesus? “*They appeared in glory and were talking about his departure, which he was going to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.*” (Luke 9:31 EHV)¹ Jesus needed their encouragement just then.

High altitude exertion, emotional anxiety, the holy presence of God – all got to Peter and his companions and weighed them down with sleep. Hard to believe anyone could sleep through such wonders, but people do it all the time. When the Good News is announced, our stinking sinful self that wants no cross keeps whining, “I've heard this before!” Or like the ancient Israelites, “Stop confronting us with the Lord God of Israel! Tell us pleasant things. Make us feel good!” **Glory** without God?

¹ EHV – Scriptures – *Evangelical Heritage Version*. The Wartburg Project, © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022. The rest NIV84.

In typical fashion Peter has to say something even though they're terrified and he does not know what to say. Can any of us relate? Nervous – so you talk more? The others fell into silence. But what a great offer from Peter. Note the number of shelters; he doesn't even think of providing for himself. And look who he puts first: **“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”** (EHV)

Ever been on a vacation you just did not want to end? Kids, what if school was out forever? What if your back yard was a mountain with lakes and streams and miles of forest to run and play, hunt and fish? What if the place was filled with light and the best people ever, best friends who loved you and always wanted to play nice? What if you could always see Jesus in His shining **glory** and never have to be sad or cry or hurt again? It's not just kids who would love that. Peter and the other disciples all wanted to keep this vision of heaven, this mountaintop experience going forever. Like us, they just did not know their plan would ruin everything forever. **We love God's glory.** We feel it in worship often – here and in our private prayers and meditations. But first, before we taste **God's** eternal **glory**...

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“A cloud appeared and over-shadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud...” (EHV) That's how God appeared in Old Testament times to keep from terrifying sinners in His holy presence. The *Shekinah*, bright shining cloud, hid everything but His voice. And now God sums up all we need to know to overcome drama and darkness, to survive the sorrows and not be overawed and distracted by earth's fleeting day. It's all right here as the spotlight of heaven shines on Jesus. It happened as Epiphany began when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Now the Father's voice thunders again and adds the key component to our life with God on earth, bound for heaven: **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.”** (EHV) Before you pray, **Listen.** Before you preach, **Listen.** When the sun is shines brightly in Epiphany, **Listen.** Be prepared for the dark days of Lent when tears must fall for our sins and the shame we brought on His innocent head. Especially when all seems lost, **Listen. Listen. Listen** to Jesus.

Usually, Mark will indicate the sudden passage of time with a common word for **“immediately.”** (εὐθὺς) Mark's God-inspired intense action dramatizes the high powered ministry of our Lord. Here, however, at Jesus' Transfiguration the Holy Spirit is indicating more than the sudden passage of time. There's an *unexpected suddenness* (ἐξάπννα) of coming “back down to earth” again. Their *sudden shock* was laced with extreme disappointment at the loss of the heavenly vision. Jesus' disciples naturally wanted to keep on seeing His glory. Yet God gave them this vision to prepare them for their most extreme grief and bitter disappointment when they would deny their Lord at His crucifixion. God knows our needs as well – both our need for humbling and our need for encouragement to keep our spirits up. If we feel ourselves slipping into depression, the Holy Spirit Counselor will lift us up with the Good News of sins forgiven. When pride stalks us, we need a **“clean heart,”** ours for the asking. (Psalm 51:10) Meanwhile, both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are interceding for us 24/7. (Read Romans 8.)

It Is Good to be Here, but the true **glory** of Christ's Transfiguration is not in His shining face and clothing. We need no “Peterbilt tents” (Rich Gurgel) for heaven on earth. High, wide and easy could have saved Jesus so much grief. But it would have condemned us to eternal torment for our sins. Our guilt of sin had to be removed. Only innocent blood could wash it all away. Only Jesus, God's sinless Son, could accomplish the redemption of our soul with the whole human race. The true **glory** of Christ's Transfiguration is that He willingly, steadfastly, in spite of temptation from His lead disciple, took them down the mountain all the way to Jerusalem and Mount Calvary. God's glory has always been to love guilty sinners, to cleanse us completely. God shares His glory in our status as His dear children, our privilege of suffering with Christ under the cross, our dignity under persecution with the apostles and martyrs, our robes of His righteousness already shining in our baptism, and ever brighter to the full light of day. Savior, lead on. I follow you, listening through Lent to Easter, under the cross to triumph and resurrection. Your Word, your will, your way. Amen.