

2 Peter 1:16-21 To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Who is it that is sitting in your spot in your pew this morning? (And I'm not referring to that someone who is sitting in your usual spot instead of you.) No, I'm talking about you! Who are you sitting there? Which persona do we see? Is it the real you? Is it the face that you show to the world while the real you hides behind the mask? Is it the person that *we* want to see as we look at through our own filters and lenses?

At the time of Jesus' Transfiguration there were a lot of stories floating around about who Jesus really was. Shortly before this account, Jesus had asked his disciples, "***Who do the people say I am?***" "***Oh, some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets,***" they replied.

Even after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the stories continued. People said that Jesus wasn't fully human or that he wasn't fully God or a host of variations in-between. Others said that Jesus was just a spirit that appeared as a man. Others that Jesus was a semi-god but not the actual Son of God.

And we still hear stories two thousand years later. People say that Jesus ranks right up there with the likes of Ghandi, Mohammed, and Mother Theresa. They say, Jesus was certainly a great prophet and a good example to follow, but he's not *God*.

And certainly, from one perspective, one could argue that Jesus himself is responsible for all of the confusion, after all, he didn't fully reveal himself to the crowds. Of

course, if he *had* fully revealed himself, sinful people would have died in his perfect and almighty presence. Rather, Jesus took on human flesh, hid his glory, provided centuries of prophecy to help his people identify him, and then fulfilled those prophecies.

Now with all of that, people then and now *should* have no problem identifying him for who he really is. But they do have a problem. In fact, if it weren't for the gift and work of the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't know him either. It's kind of like the man who went to his doctor and said, "Doc, I'm really worried. Every time I drink a cup of coffee, I feel a stabbing pain in my eye. Do you think it's serious?" The doctor replied, "No, try taking the spoon out of your cup."¹¹

We may not have a spoon blinding us and causing pain in our eyes, but because of sin, we see things from a certain perspective, a certain way that may very well prevent us from seeing things as God would have us...seeing Jesus from his perspective.

In today's gospel, Peter, James and John were all given a vision, a new way of seeing Jesus when he was transfigured before them. This changed their perspective of him and gave them a new understanding. And though it wasn't immediate understanding (after all, Peter only got part of the point right at first), it certainly became eternal understanding as Jesus' revealed glory identified him as the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Messiah. Peter wrote, ***To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*** ¹⁷ ***For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."***¹¹ ¹⁸ ***We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.***

But as you know, it wasn't all *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah* from then on out, was it? No, in fact, life got pretty bad. Jesus would descend the mount of Transfiguration, set his sights on Jerusalem and ascend another mount, Mt. Cavalry, where he would continue his mission as Savior of the World. There he would suffer and die for those questioning disciples, for those doubting sceptics, for those weak followers, for those struggling faithful, yes, for you, for me.

The disciples would find themselves hiding for their lives, persecuted for their testimony, and martyred for their faith.

And the truth is, life isn't any easier for us as we battle temptation, hold forth the cross, and hold fast to Jesus.

Yet in the midst of it all – the Savior's suffering, the disciples' witnessing, even our own struggling – the *Majestic Glory* of this moment shines to assure us of our forgiveness, to strengthen us in our weakness, to embolden us in our faithfulness, and to see through the pain to Jesus in the beauty of his fullness.

Among the famous painters of the French impressionist school, Henri Matisse and Auguste Renoir were the closest friends. When Renoir's health failed and doctors forced him into confinement for the final decade of his life, Matisse visited him daily. Renoir, almost paralyzed with arthritis, continued to paint at his easel in spite of his infirmities. One afternoon, Matisse watched his friend painting, fighting torturous pain with each movement and stroke of the brush. He finally blurted out, "Auguste, why do you continue to paint when you are in such agony?" Renoir never looked up. His eyes were fixed on the canvas with complete

concentration. Then he spoke softly, "The beauty remains. The pain passes." ⁱⁱ

Yes, the beauty of this moment on the mount remains as the pain of our earthly life passes. *We ... have the completely reliable prophetic word ... as ... a lamp shining in a dark place ... the day [has] dawn[ed] ... the Morning Star [has risen in our] hearts ...* and it is this glorious light of the gospel that lights our way until we can see the LORD's glory for ourselves. It is God's word that provides the light we need until we get to heaven where Jesus himself will be our eternal light.

This is why Peter calls on us to *pay close attention* to the light of the Word, not as *cunningly devised fables* or as something from *someone's imagination*, or from *the will of men*, but as it truly is: *from God. Completely reliable, inspired by the Holy Spirit*, the LORD reveals his glory to you in it, and through it, empowers your daily life. When you're depressed because of the cold, dark season, thoughts of Jesus' glorious resurrection can warm your heart. When you feel lonely, you can be with Jesus on that holy mountain. When your work or family overwhelm you, you can raise your eyes above all of that and look up to the mountaintop where the LORD has revealed his glory. Because it is this *Majestic Glory* revealed to you, that through the gospel, reveals to you not only who Jesus really is, but who you really are in him. So that when those around you are hurting, struggling, searching, even challenging, you can point them through the pain to *their* beautiful Savior. **AMEN.**

ⁱ Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

ⁱⁱ *ibid*