

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Transfiguration Sunday
February 11, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Easter teaser

²After six days 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 clothes became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. ⁴And Elijah appeared to them together with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say because they were terrified. ⁷A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.” ⁸Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus alone. 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.

—Mark 9:2-9

It's Super Bowl Sunday. Are you ready for it? I bet many of you are watching tonight. The Super Bowl is so big that even the commercials are hyped up. Recently, some Super Bowl ads have had a string of previous ads that lead up to the commercial during the big game. These ads are called “teasers.” A teaser is intended to make people interested in watching the upcoming advertisement by giving just a little bit of information. The teaser was meant to be a short snapshot of something to come. A few years ago, Hulu, the video-streaming platform, had a famous teaser for their Super Bowl commercial which made people speculate if NFL legend, Tom Brady, would retire.

There is another teaser that was connected to an even greater event that we read on this Super Bowl Sunday. This is what is often called the Transfiguration of our Lord. Here, Jesus gives a glimpse of his glory to a few of his disciples. This glory would ultimately be revealed more fully later. Today, we consider Jesus' resurrection which is an Easter teaser.

With today's service, we are at the culmination of our worship series “From Jordan to the Mount.” We began with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. This was an instance in which God the Father called down from heaven and said, “You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.” (Mark 1:11) Then, we followed Jesus as he demonstrated himself to be the Son of God through his authoritative teaching and his miraculous actions. All that time, Jesus was demonstrated to be the Son of God, but he did not make full and frequent use of his divine attributes. Often, he just appeared to be another person. Now, we look at an occasion where the Father once again speaks from heaven and says, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.” (Mark 2:7) On this occasion though, Jesus' appearance was different. Here, in his transfiguration, he reveals his glory as the Son of God.

On this occasion, Jesus brought Peter, James, and John with him. During Jesus' time on earth, these three seemed to take special places of closeness to Jesus among the disciples. On this mountain, Jesus shared something amazing with them. He was transfigured before them. He allowed them to see the radiance of his glory. His clothes became radiant white. Jesus' appearance went far beyond the ability for us to describe. His garment was whiter than a launderer could make clothing.

When Jesus was transfigured, two individuals joined him and began to converse with him. These two were Moses and Elijah. When people consider this account, they may wonder why are Moses and Elijah there. Well, Moses and Elijah were two dominant figures in the Old Testament Scriptures. Moses was the man God used to write the first five books of the Bible. Elijah is a prominent name among all the prophets of God. These are those that God used to bring his Word to his people and the world. Also, it is interesting to note that both of these Old Testament figures were taken from this life in mysterious ways. Moses died after seeing the promised land and the LORD buried him. Elijah didn't even die. We read about Elijah this morning as the LORD brought him up in a whirlwind. Perhaps, these were the two men who joined Jesus and spoke with him because they represented God's Word brought to his people. Moses wrote much of the Scriptures. Elijah was a leading prophet. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his exodus. This refers to Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Perhaps, the presence of Moses and Elijah was meant to testify to the disciples that Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension are the key to the whole Scriptures.

Peter's reaction to seeing the glory of Jesus revealed is peculiar. When Moses asked to see the glory of the LORD, the LORD did not allow him to receive a full view of his glory. Then the LORD said to Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20) Then, in the following examples of people being confronted with angels, who were in the presence of God's glory, the people would fall terrified. They knew that sinful humans could not just come and see the glory of God. Yet, here Peter sees the glory of God revealed fully in Christ Jesus and he responds by saying that it was good to be there. This seems to teach a truth about Jesus being the way for humans to come into the presence of God's glory.

Although Peter's reaction is peculiar, it may be exactly how we would respond. Peter, James, and John got to see God's glory revealed. Then, they didn't drop dead. So, it would make sense that Peter would respond by wanting to stay there. He offered to put up three tents. One for each of these people; Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Peter's reaction was peculiar, perhaps relatable, yet dead wrong. Peter wanted to put up tents to cause them to stay on that mountain. Peter's desire to stay there would have stopped God's ultimate plan. This Transfiguration was not meant to be it. This Transfiguration was only a glimpse or a teaser.

Following Peter's puzzling remark, a cloud covered them. Then, the Father spoke from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him." This whole transfiguration was a demonstration of who Jesus was. Jesus is the Son of God. This connects well to what is written in Hebrews, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature." (Hebrews 1:3)

After the cloud was removed, only Jesus stood there. He appeared again as he normally did, with the glory of God hidden. Jesus instructed his disciples to keep this event hidden as they went down the mountain. Why? This event was simply a teaser. This was an Easter teaser. Jesus' transfiguration was a short demonstration of his glory as the Son of God. The ultimate demonstration of God's glory is the resurrection. The ultimate indication that Jesus is the Son of God is the resurrection. As is written in Romans, "This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God's powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord." (Romans 1:3-4)

So, why did Jesus give these disciples a glimpse of his glory... an Easter teaser? Well, after this Jesus doesn't always look so glorious. Jesus would go on to be blasphemed on trial. He would be mocked and beaten. He would then die on a cross between two criminals. Jesus' passion wouldn't seem too glorious. So, this marks forward the purpose of his passion. The man betrayed, beaten, and beguiled, is the glorious Son of God.

Jesus revealed his glory in a different way than you might expect. Jesus took only three people with him. Then on a high mountain, he revealed his glory to them as the Son of God. As we see this, we might wonder why he didn't reveal his glory in a "greater" way.

In our world, we understand displays of glory. Think again of the Super Bowl. It is estimated that customers will spend 17.3 billion dollars tied to the Super Bowl. This event is supposed to be "glorious" and it is demonstrated by its grandeur. People demonstrate the glory of the Super Bowl by showing it with their spending. 113 million people are all tied to this event.

Yet, when Jesus revealed his glory at the Transfiguration, no money was spent. Only three people were there to witness his glory. Temporary structures were not built. Then, afterward, Jesus told his disciples to not tell anyone. God works differently than our world works. Our world may be all about outward displays of "glory," yet God reveals his glory differently.

Brothers and sisters, how do you look for God to show us his glory today? Are you tempted to think like Peter and desire God's glory on your terms? Peter wanted to build tents and stay there. Yet, that is not what God's plan was. This was just a teaser. God had greater plans to reveal his glory.

Where do you look for God's glory? What do you think it ought to appear as? Many people want God's glorious appearance to be much like the Super Bowl. Millions upon millions of people are watching. Glitz. Glamour. Famous people everywhere. God's glory doesn't come to us on our terms. God's glory isn't always revealed to us in ways like the Transfiguration.

Does it feel like God's glory is revealed to us today? Today, you don't get to see the radiance of his glory in the same way. Today, we are in a meager church. Today, there are millions of people spending millions of dollars being spent on this service. This morning, somewhere around 25 million Americans will go to church. This evening four times as many people will watch the Super Bowl. Does this feel glorious to you?

Let us not look for God to reveal his glory on our terms. If we do so, that is a sin. If we look for God's glory in earthly ways that can't even express it, we are missing out. Do not feel bummed out about how God reveals his glory to you.

So, forget your feelings. Let's focus on the facts. Today is glorious. We gather for worship on Sunday mornings because these are mini-Easter celebrations. Today is the Son's day. Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus' death and resurrection are the ultimate demonstrations of God's glory. This is the testimony that Jesus is the Son of God. Since Jesus is the Son of God, you can know that all he did for you works and every promise he made to you is true. In Jesus, you are forgiven for demanding God's glory on your terms. In Jesus, you are forgiven for relying on your feelings. In Jesus, you are forgiven for all of your sins. Because of what Jesus has done, you will experience God's glory to the fullest. You will be brought into your God's glorious presence. You will stand with all the saints triumphant. You will see the glorified Jesus face to face.

Let us not worry if today feels glorious. The glory of God is brought to you through mundane means because the glorified Jesus comes to you. When the word is preached, the glorified Jesus is there. In bread and wine, the glorified Jesus' body and blood come to you. In all this, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, which is the ultimate demonstration of God's glory. This also means that he will bring you to be with him. Thank God for this Easter teaser.

Super Bowl Sunday may seem like a glorious event. Worship today may seem rather mundane. Yet, this is a truly glorious event. This is how the glorified Jesus' comes to us. God's glory isn't revealed to us on our terms. So, thank God. It comes in greater ways. We will ultimately see the glory of God in heaven when we stand in his presence forever. Amen.