

Luke 9:28-36

The Transfiguration + March 3, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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Listening to Him

The Word of the Lord from Luke 9: "A voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

There's never a time in the Gospels that Jesus looks more like God than in our Gospel lesson. Even when He's risen from the dead and ascending into heaven, He still looks like a man. Until He returns in glory on the Last Day, the Transfiguration is as glorious-looking as Jesus gets. His face alters in appearance and His garments shine lightning-white. He gives a glimpse of what we will see when we stand before His throne in heaven.

This is it, the one time in the Gospels that Jesus shows a little bit of divinity in His appearance. He's also got two of the heavy-hitters of the Old Testament with Him. Moses and Elijah live in Christ and they are gathered to that mountain to speak with Him – not to trade old war stories for the young rabbi, for their talk is worshipfully all about Jesus. To top it off, a cloud arrives and overshadows the scene, and it's a distinctly Old-Testament cloud that testifies that God the Father Himself has arrived.

Long-gone prophets live and speak. Jesus is transfigured as the dazzling-white and holy Son of God. God the Father arrives in a cloud. It's quite a sight.

Then God the Father speaks, and He says the most curious thing. He says, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him."

Listen to Him. Not a delighted Father saying, "Look at Him! Just *look* at My boy!" Now that Jesus finally looks divine, His Father says, "Listen to Him."

There are reasons for this, of course. If we stop looking and instead listen to what is said in the text, we understand why the Father says what He does.

What is said? Our text begins by saying that it was "about eight days after *these sayings*." What was said eight days before? That's when Jesus told the disciples for the first time, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). Things had been going swimmingly, with Jesus casting out every demon, healing every disease and appearing pretty much invincible. But eight days ago, He said He would suffer, be rejected and killed; and the announcement has lingered in the air like a dead mouse under the floorboards. The disciples haven't known what to do with His prediction. Now on the mountain, how easy would it be for Peter, James and John to dismiss it from their minds as they look at the transfigured Son of God?

What else is said? We don't have the exact words, but we do know that Moses and Elijah are talking about Jesus' "departure," which He is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. The word for "departure" is well-known to Moses and Elijah: in Greek, it's "exodus." Moses led the Exodus in the Old Testament. He led the people out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea and across the wilderness; and before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land, he had to die on a hill outside. When the Exodus began, it began with the Passover and the sacrifice of the Passover lamb; and it ended with the Israelites entering the Promised Land after Moses' death, shortly after Moses prophesied that another prophet like him would arise.

All of that was pointing to Jesus, of course, and that's what Moses and Elijah are talking about. Jesus has a much bigger and better exodus going on, for He has come to lead His people out of the bondage of sin and into the Promised Land of heaven. For this to happen, He is the Passover Lamb who must be sacrificed. He is the One who must die on a hill outside of Jerusalem. He's already had His own Red Sea when He was baptized in the Jordan. He's already wandered the wilderness while tempted by the devil. Now the climax is coming – His suffering, His cross, His grave, His resurrection. His ascension is already foretold by Elijah, who miraculously ascended into heaven by the power of God.

So Moses and Elijah speak of Jesus' departure, His exodus, which is about to take place. Even on such a splendid, celebratory day as when Jesus is gloriously transfigured, the three of them are talking about the cross. (How very Lutheran!)

What else is said? Well, there's Peter's offer to make three tents on the mountain. He wants to stay. He wants to stay with what he's looking at. He doesn't want to leave and go to Jerusalem for what he has heard about.

Then there are those words from God the Father, "Listen to Him." That's not all He says, though: He also says, "This is My Son, My Chosen One." That might get a bell ringing, too, because God the Father has spoken one other time in Luke's gospel, and He said almost the same thing: He said to Jesus, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

He said it when Jesus was baptized. There holy Jesus stood, getting washed with all those unholy sinners. He was effectively soaking up all their washed-off sins into Himself so that He could carry them to the cross. He wasn't just hanging around with sinners, but standing with them and taking their place; so that when He was lifted up on Calvary, He would be *the* Sinner whom God condemned.

God the Father spoke from heaven to render His verdict on that day. As Jesus stood in the water getting poisoned with the sins of the people, the Father spoke from heaven and said, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." Well-pleased, said the Father: He wanted His Son there, because it was part of the plan to save you.

Now the Father says again from heaven, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him." Look, sure, but be sure to listen. The momentary glory doesn't set aside the cross. It's not a contradiction. The Lord is still going to save by His suffering and death.

The Transfiguration thus magnifies Jesus' sacrifice that much more. That dazzling-white human body will be the same one that is nailed to the cross, bleeding and dying. He doesn't lose power between now and then: no, the same Son of God – with all of that power and might – willingly foregoes the use of it to die in your place. The Substitute for your sin is not some hapless guy who is set up to be crucified for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He's God's beloved Son, the Chosen One; and He's been making His way faithfully and intentionally to the cross for you for a long, long time.

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The command to listen to the Son remains just as timely for us. You'd think it would be easier: we *can't* see our ascended Lord. But that doesn't stop sinners from trying to see Jesus anyway.

You'll always be tempted, to look for Jesus everywhere *but* in His Word, and we can sum up the two main places you'll be tempted to look pretty easily: inside and outside.

On the one hand, you'll be tempted to look inside yourself to see Jesus. This is commonly described as looking for Jesus in your heart. When this happens, you decide what is God-pleasing and

what is not by how it makes you feel. If something feels right, then it must be what God wants you to do. If you're attracted to it, then it must be something that God wants you to have. If it makes you feel bad or uncomfortable, it must be something that God wants you to avoid.

This is a gateway to all sorts of trouble; because for sinners, sin is usually easier and more attractive. All sorts of sins feel good: if sins were repulsive and painful at the start, the devil would have a much tougher time. Sometimes, sins feel good because they quickly cover up shame so that you can move on, even if the shame is driven deep to harden your heart or rot it out later. But as a pastor, I run into too many people who say something like, "I know that the Bible says this is a sin, but I think it's the right thing for *me* to do." If you examine that sentence, it says, "I've stopped listening to God where He's promised to speak, so I'm betting my soul on my own opinion."

By the way, some equate this idea of finding God within you to "being spiritual." But the Lord promises that His Holy Spirit reveals Him to you by His Word. If you want to be spiritual and Spirit-filled, read your Bible.

You're also tempted to look outside of yourself to see Jesus. Sometimes that means looking to others: for centuries, the Church has warned against the idea that "the voice of the people is the voice of God" (*vox populi, vox dei*); yet too often churches follow society's lead and teach approvingly of whatever the world says. The danger should be clear: a sin that a whole bunch of sinners loves is no less sinful than your personal favorite; yet there's always the temptation to go with the crowd when the crowd says that the Bible is out of date or insufficient. To go this route is to say, "I believe that, instead of the Bible, God now speaks through those who take exception to what He says in the Bible." That's a problem.

You'll also be tempted to look to circumstance. It looks like God loves you when things are going well, but not so much when things go badly. If you look to see God in circumstance, and life always ends in death and mourning, you're going to have to conclude that God is always angry with people when they're breathing their last and need Him the most.

Beware of looking to find God inside your heart or outside in public opinion or circumstance. Whenever you do, you're setting yourself up to claim some of Jesus' glory for yourself; and whenever you make yourself appear more glorious, you're also cheapening His death for you, making it look less sacrificial and less loving.

When you find yourself looking for God in all the wrong places, repent. And listen to Him.

Listen to Him, remembering what you heard Him say last week – that He came to preach good news. Listen to Him, and rejoice in the good news that the chosen, beloved Son of God allowed Himself to be put on a cross to die for all of your sins, even all those times that you've trusted your heart or public opinion over His clear, inerrant Word.

Listen to Him, because His words once spoken into your ear at the font echo through your daily life, because He has said to you, "I baptize *you*." And in saying that, He has said, "*You* are My beloved child. I have chosen you."

Listen to Him, for so He visits you this day. Look at the altar, and all you see is bread and wine. Listen to Him, and He declares that it is His body and blood, given and shed for you.

Listen to Him, because even when your heart accuses and all you see is past mistakes, the chosen One with all authority in heaven and on earth says to you, "I forgive you all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen