**Luke 9:28-36 February 27, 2022**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 9 here re-reading these words. “Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In times of trouble, when faith is pushed to the brink, when we falter, and grow weak, we look for a sign. A sign that things will get better, that things won’t be so bad, a sign even from God. A sign of his love, a sign of his presence, a sign to let us know that He’s in control. These past few years have been filled with conflict, disease, death, and division. We look around our world and find us still dealing with the effects of a global pandemic, so many who have lost friends and family and dealing with grief. There have been tensions between countries and the threat of conflict all throughout the history of our world, but this week we saw it spill over into Russia invading Ukraine. We don’t know what the future holds as the situation is changing daily. What will it mean for both of those countries? And our country? And our lives? How can we deal with larger global struggles, while still dealing with struggles in our own country, while still dealing with personal struggles, small struggles in the context of what the world is facing but things that plague us, wear us down, cause us to doubt and struggle on our own road, in our own daily life. The road is long, trouble seems to be all around us, we look to the Lord and look for a sign, and today we find one.

Christ stands up on the mountain and his face is “altered” or “transfigured” meaning that these selected disciples see his Divinity and his clothes become a dazzling white. Moses and Elijah, the heroes of the faith appear and talk to Jesus about his upcoming departure. Moses, the leader of the Israelites who led them out of captivity in Egypt and was given the Law, the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets who was so blessed by God that he didn’t experience death but was taken up to God in a fiery chariot. This was a sign of Christ’s divinity, the miracles pointed to the power that Jesus wielded over creation and the omnipotent power that He has as God’s own Son and God himself as the second person of the Trinity, but here was the peeling back of the shroud that was laid throughout Christ’s state of humiliation, a small step up when the steps only led down from his conception, to his birth, to his life and suffering our mortal flesh which gets tired and hungry and thirsty and feels pain. The steps that will continue as he suffers under Pontius Pilate, is crucified, dies, and is buried. This is the setting aside of that for just a moment, to be refreshed, to receive, to go up to a solitary place of peace and see that the man that they were following wasn’t just a man, he wasn’t some kind of magician or illusionist who performed simple tricks, what he did were miracles, he was one with a true authority, he was the greatest teacher who ever lived, he was truly the Son of God. The evidence was plentiful, not just his face altering, his clothes dazzling white, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and the fact that they recognized that they were Moses and Elijah which is a miracle in itself, but that a cloud overshadowed the Mountain and the voice that spoke at Jesus Baptism returns with a similar message, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” What greater sign could anyone ask for? What could uplift someone to follow Jesus more than that?

But where’s our sign? Where’s our Transfiguration moment? Sure that was nice for them, but what about us? It is at the core of our human flesh and sinful nature to hear about anything that happens in our world, from changes to policies or steps taken to keep people safe from disease, or to hear about conflicts across the world and the loss of human life and the suffering of other people and to think about yourself. What about me? How will this affect me? Will it cost more for me? Will I lose out on what I wanted to do? There is a very humorous song that was written called “Why does this always happen to me?” In it the singer is watching television when the program is interrupted, telling about a horrible tragedy that happened in another country. The singer then explains how this is a horrible tragedy, because they had to interrupt his show just for this. Later he talks about driving down the street when he comes upon a car accident and finds out that it was his friend who had gotten hurt. His expression of sadness isn’t for his friend, but for the fact that now he’s going to be late for work and that his friend owed him money that he probably won’t be able to pay back anytime soon. Now these are humorous examples from a comedy singer, but ask yourself, honestly, how many times when you hear about what has happened to others, you only think about how it affects you. Me. What about me? What will happen to me? And don’t for a second think that these disciples who did receive this glorious sign are immune from this disease of selfishness brought on by sin. These men who saw this wonderful picture of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration ran when they arrested Jesus. They abandoned him for their own self-preservation. When the going got rough, and things got bad, they again returned and defaulted to their own self interests. Even after receiving such a miraculous sign.

You’ve received miraculous signs. You were baptized in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. A cross was placed both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Jesus Christ the crucified. You were adopted into God’s family and made his child through the simple means of water and God’s Word. You receive the miraculous sign of being forgiven your sins from God when you repent and come to him here in his house, when you confess your sins, when you mess up, when you make mistakes, when you are selfish he forgives you without any other condition, without any other requirement, he forgives you completely and totally, removing your sin as far as the East is from the West. That’s a miracle. And before you sits the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in with and under bread and wine! The really present body and blood of Jesus, right there, sitting on the altar, that you get to receive for the forgiveness of your sins, the strengthening of your faith, and the strengthening of your bond with each other as brothers and sisters of Christ in a common confession and belief in what you are receiving. If you want a sign of God’s love it’s right there! And you get to receive it often. Christ provides it for you, gives it to you for free. It’s all for you, if you want to know what God has done specifically for you, if all you can think about is you, and how it affects you, then here in God’s house you can see how Christ is all for you in many and various ways, being reminded of your Baptism, being forgiven your sins and receiving His body and blood.

But you can’t live here. Peter’s words are telling to Jesus on that Mountain, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah – not knowing what he said.” On the one hand Peter was wrong because he was putting Jesus on equal footing with Moses and Elijah, denying his place as the second person of the Trinity, denying his very divinity. But as Luke records, he didn’t know what he was saying, and the only way Luke would know that is if Peter was the one who basically told him when he recounted what happened. But they couldn’t stay. They couldn’t stay on the mountain, they were heading toward Jerusalem, the place of Jesus departure. It was going to get worse before it got better and they couldn’t just stay on the mountain and bask in the limited light of the sign of Christ’s divinity, the salvation of the world must be accomplished. There are many times in television sitcoms where the family would go on a vacation to a tropical location, they’d go on a cruise, they’d visit Hawaii or Jamaica or somewhere much different than where they were from, and the temptation was always the same, let’s quit our jobs, sell our house, and move to this wonderful place! And a few scenes later you see that they come to their senses. They can’t leave their jobs, they can’t uproot their lives just to live on a beach. They have to face reality, but they’d be refreshed to do it after spending some time in the sun. We can’t just stay here, while the world is at war. We can’t hide in the church, no more than the faithful Lutherans of Ukraine can just sit and do nothing. We must face the sinful reality of ourselves and of this world, and strive to help others in need as best we can with the resources and talents that God has blessed us with. We must help in global conflicts by raising up our voices in prayer, regularly for those who are in harms way and facing death. We must support any opportunity to give of ourselves for the cause of freedom and peace. We must see in our own daily lives the needs of others, rather than just the necessities we need to keep going down our own road, but call someone, write them a letter, check up on them and help them on their road so it’s easier for them.

This Sunday, where we see the dazzling white of the altar, where we sing glad and glorious and wonderful hymns of Alleluia! This is the sign. This is the strength to come down from the mountain and enter into the valley of Lent. The time of preparation where we focus on our own sin, and selfishness, and rebellion. This is the beach, the tropical vacation, the time to fill up our hearts with the Sun before we go into the 40 days of purple and repentance, where we set aside the Alleluias, where we travel on the road to the cross. And if you feel let down by that fact, that Lent is coming, if your road is feeling too long and it’s too hard to face the struggles of a world at war, I bring you this verse from the Hymn “For All the Saints”. “And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong, Alleluia! Alleluia!” Steals on the ear meaning that it…it creeps up on you, it sneaks up on you, you’re reminded of it and not even realizing it’s truth until it’s there in your mind. When the world is a messy place and beats you down. When the fight against sin is hard and you fail again and again. When the war seems to never end in your own heart, or amongst your family, or your friends, or your job, or just in your life. That distant triumph song, the truth of what Jesus Christ is showing his disciples here in his transfiguration sneaks up on you. He was more than just a man. He was God, God who came here to this world to die in your place, and take you from this world of war and death to a heavenly banquet. A place of victory. And I pray that truth would make your heart brave, your arms strong, and give you the confidence of Christ’s love to face whatever the world throws at you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.