**Mark 9:2-9 February 14, 2021**

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 the Gospel of Mark the 9th chapter here re-reading these words. “And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’”

This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you have a role model? Someone you look up to and have hoped to be like in your life? For some our role models have talent and abilities that we weren’t blessed with. You could wish you were tall like Shaquille O’Neal. You could wish you were strong like Arnold Schwarzenegger, or fast like Barry Sanders. You could wish you were effortlessly funny and energetic like comedian Robin Williams. You can look at characteristics and abilities and aspire to be like your role model. I want to be as wholesome and caring as Fred Rogers. I want to be as confident and sure as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. I want to be artistic and creative like William Shakespeare or Mozart, Handel, or Bach. Maybe you don’t have a role model that is world famous and many other people know about and look up to. Maybe for you, all you want is to be able to cook like your mother, work like your father, sew or quilt like your grandmother, or tell jokes like your grandfather. Maybe your role model is still alive and you get to see them, or perhaps they live only in your memories of how they behaved and you want to behave that way too.

What about in our faith? Do we have role models? Absolutely! Again, I bring your attention to the symbols on the altar of the apostles, they were role models. These symbols reference how they were martyred but also where they served and what they did. The Christian rock duo “Lost and Found” sung a song called “New Creation” that talks about characteristics or actions that we as God’s people want to mimic in our journey and lives as Christians. They sing, “I want to see like Daniel, I want to love like John, I want to hope like Mary, I want to be the rock that’s built upon, I want to laugh like Sarah, I want to preach like Paul, I want to live like Lazarus… I want to be a new creation.” These role models of the faith are what we call saints. Today, on Valentine’s Day we remember St. Valentine, a Martyr of the faith who was said to leave a note of encouragement that looked different and unique to other notes, he left that note to the child of his jailer before he was killed for confessing the name of Jesus Christ. You can look to any of the saints as examples. You can add the bravery of David, the wisdom of Solomon, and even point to the lives of Moses and Elijah, the prophets who appear and speak to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, as we find in our Gospel lesson for this, Transfiguration Sunday, to the list of role models. Elijah was brave, faithful, and one who spoke for Jesus in challenging times. Moses was a leader of God’s people who led them out of Egypt and slavery, the one that God himself used to part the waters of the Red Sea and vanquish the forces of Pharaoh as the waters closed again around them.

Peter too can be a role model, the very rock that we just talked about that God built his church upon. Should we remember these saints? These role models? Should we look up to them as we do the examples of excellence in our modern society? Here is what our Lutheran Confessions say in the Augsburg Confession in reference to how we should view saints, “Our churches teach that the history of saints may be set before us so that we may follow the example of their faith and good works, according to our calling.” There it is, clear as crystal, Augsburg Confession, Article 21, first sentence. It’s alright for us to have the various disks that show Daniel, Moses, and David. It’s alright to have these symbols on our altar, and the pulpit, and lectern. We aren’t to forget these role models of the faith but instead we are to learn from them and look at their faith and good works for inspiration.

But here’s the problem. We found it in our Gospel lesson. Jesus is transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James and John on the Mountain. He shines white and pure, his divinity is clearly seen and shown to these sinful men. Appearing beside him is Moses and Elijah, role models, saints, prophets of God who spoke by God and did powerful miracles only through God working through them. And Peter assumes that this means they are co-equal in some way. “Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Moses and Elijah are not equal to Jesus Christ. Moses and Elijah are not to be prayed to or worshipped. Moses and Elijah can’t forgive sins, heal injuries, sustain faith, or promise eternal life through their names. And some churches have confused the saints to be on par with Christ, that we should pray to them and ask for their assistance, when they are incapable of providing any kind of support. It continues in the Augsburg Confession Article 21 referring to the saints to say, “But the Scriptures do not teach that we are to call on the saints or to ask the saints for help. Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to. He has promised that He will hear our prayer.”

Are you praying to the saints? If so, it is my responsibility to tell you from this pulpit, pointing out the authoritative Word of God and our own Lutheran Confessions that this is a sin and should be immediately stopped. But there is something else at work here. The positive side of role models is that they teach us, we learn from them and better ourselves and our lives. The negative side is that role models don’t stay in that category but become idols. We become obsessed with every aspect of their lives. We start to put our desires of being more like them over what God has called us to be and what talents God has blessed us with. We become covetous of height, strength, and speed that we can’t possibly obtain. We want to be rich and famous like other people so that others look at us. Our obsession takes the attributes and abilities of others and makes it all about me, which turns the example of others into glorification of self. Suddenly, I am my own role model. I am my own idol. My former role models had faults and shortcomings, they had a fall from grace, my favorite athlete had to retire or got injured. My favorite comedian is guilty of scandal, a problem, an addiction, their movie flopped or they passed away. Others can’t be trusted, they are sinful, they are bad, they let me down. Even the example of the saints. Peter was hot tempered, angry, violent, here on the Mount of Transfiguration he makes a huge mistake concerning Jesus. David sins with Bathsheba, Moses got angry and hit the rock and was barred from entering the promised land. The list goes on and on. Even Martin Luther is seen as violent, rude, and not politically correct to the world around us and the changing norms of our society today. No….you can’t look to others for inspiration you look only to yourself. And you can excuse your wrongs. Others make mistakes but not me. It was their fault. It was their problem. It wasn’t me, it was them. We become idols to ourselves. Instead of building three tents, one for Christ, one for our role model, and one for me, it becomes all about me. One tent. One direction of worship, me. I don’t need church, I need time to do more for me.

When Peter gets this so terribly wrong on the Mount of Transfiguration God himself speaks from heaven, the voice that comes from the cloud and sets things right. “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” In a world of me, me, me, the realization that it isn’t about me, it’s about him, is what matters. That’s the final revelation and epiphany of this season. It’s not about me, it’s about him. What he came to do. Who he is, the perfect Son of God. You want a role model? Him. You want peace and understanding? Him. You want life, strength, forgiveness, and all the stuff that really matters and won’t pass away and rot and perish and decay? Him. Jesus Christ. The transfigured one, revealed, shining bright and white and perfect. The very Son of God, who didn’t come for himself, but came for you. To die for you. To save you. To be the inspiration for any saint that you look up to. To be the source of any power, goodness, talent, or ability that any worldly role model may have that inspires you in this earthly life. Him. It’s all about him. He is the ultimate role model. He is the one to emulate and aspire to be like, even though it’s impossible. He is the one who saves you. It’s not about me, it’s not about you, it’s all about him.

Does this truth take away from how we view the saints in our church? Not at all! We remember Peter for the good and the bad, same with Moses, Elijah, Martin Luther, or any other saint in the church. Same as you remember your loved ones who were examples and role models for you in your life. You have to keep things in the proper perspective. You can love your mother’s cooking, you can aspire to be as confident as she was, or strong as she was, or loving as she was, but you can’t overlook the fact that she was a sinner and that she needed the same forgiveness that Jesus Christ gives to you. Saints are role models, examples, they help to teach us how to live, but they can’t become the center of our prayers or worship here in this house, even if our church was a St. Peter, a St. John, a St. Mark Lutheran Church. We learn from them about Jesus, we see in their example how Christ is the sole focus of our worship and adoration as God’s very own children.

And we need a reality check to who we are looking up to. We need to recognize our own humble state before God our Father, which is why the road of our lives as Christians in the Church Year now moves down from the mountain. Down from the white, bleached, clean picture of God’s divinity in the person of Jesus Christ, and down not to the green valley, but to the dark, black, pit. To sadness, mourning, and ashes. To a time of setting aside the Alleluias and seeing ourselves not as idols of worship in our own minds, but chiefs of sinners and those in need of forgiveness and life. The time of Lent is here again, but we do not despair. We do not journey into the darkness to stay there. For we will return to a place of white, of divine revelation, and Jesus Christ standing triumphant over death and the grave. A place where we, unlike last year, will gather together here in God’s house to sing beloved songs of victory, with Easter lilies and glad tidings for each other that Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia! That’s the end of the journey. On Wednesday, is the beginning. God bless you this final day of white, of revelation and epiphany, a day focused on love and relationships here on February 14th, but ultimately a day again where we come and receive from God’s providing hand the gifts He gives through His Son, our Savior.

Amen.

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

Amen.