

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD
(Epiphany the Last - V)
Luth. Church of the Master - Troy
February 9, 1975

"IS ANYBODY LISTENING?"

"While Peter was talking, a shining cloud came over them and a voice said from the cloud: 'This is my own dear Son, with whom I am well pleased - listen to him!' (Matt. 17:5)

Is Anybody Listening? Does anyone really listen? How many times parents have asked this question. How many times pastors have asked the same? *and children*

The answer is YES! We do listen. Experts claim that the majority of communication is listening.

CBS has done studies determining that over 90% of our knowledge of world events comes to us through listening to radio, TV, or other people.

Paul Rankin, a Detroit research specialist, surveyed the personal communication activities of 68 adults in different occupations. For two months these people kept track every 15 minutes of the amount of speaking, reading, writing, and listening that they did. Rankin found that on the average that 70% of their day was spent in communication: 9% in writing; 16% in reading; 30% in speaking; and 45% in listening.

A salesmanager for a national electronics firm had his secretary keep track of what he actually did during office hours. The results showed that 35 - 40% of his salary was being paid for him TO LISTEN.

Yes, we DO A LOT OF LISTENING. A great quantity of listening - but the quality and source are the focus of today's text. To whom do we listen? Is anybody listening to him? What impact has his message made upon our lives?

PAUSE

How can we answer this? How do we really know? I'm tempted to say - simply by our actions. But that answer could be an oversimplification. It's oversimplified because Christ's message is often a general one -- and further, his message experiences great distortion and competition in ~~an electronic~~ age.

That is, we are bombarded with barriers and distractions that short circuit our listening and our response to Christ.

For instance - the media, as important as it is, is also a barrier to Christ's message. The constant drone of noise, and news, and come-ons, and musical clatter has ERODED our sensitivity /to listening - esp. listening to GOOD NEWS.

Further - the media today is used for religious broadcasting. That can be very good for persons who are shut-in. But far too many people limit their listening and their response to Christ to a radio ~~and~~ T.V. program. When God says "listen to him" he means more than just hear the message - he means act the message out.

Talking is also a barrier to listening to him. So often well meaning Christians ARE SO OBSESSED with hearing themselves talk and witness, that ~~they alienate~~ others from Christ himself.

their talking alienates

Then there's the barrier of entertainment. Our philosophy too often is: If it's not entertaining, it's not worth listening to.

And since The message of Christ is not ~~always~~ ~~the most~~ entertaining - it has lost its ~~popularity~~ among ~~many~~ today.

presently

impact

Moreover - we live in an age of demand - consciousness. Everybody seems to be yelling - I'm right - listen to me. With that kind of world scene, many people simply see Christian faith as one among many demands. And so they tune out ~~of Christ's message~~ *seeing Xnty demand rather than offering.*

Another eroding force is today's tempo -- I call it the TOO BUSY BROTHER TO BOTHER bag.

Busy-ness has become the ^{cure} ~~medicine~~ for boredom, or the passage rite to prove that we are truly successful. Before we listen, we must first check the schedule. And so often we then listen with half an ear - cause we're already thinking about the next appointment.

Then there's the barrier of status - or style - or appearance that barricades our listening to Christ's message. How often is Christ's message lost because we've already labeled another person by what he wears, or by his skin pigment, or by his manner of speech.

All these - and so many more - become the barriers or distractions which either block or distort our listening to Christ's message. . . . as well as our listening to one another.

It's just not easy to LISTEN to Christ's message and to respond to it accordingly. But we're hardly alone in this predicament. Those who were closest to Jesus found it equally difficult to listen to him. That is, they found it difficult to reveal IN THEIR ACTIONS what they had heard.

These disciples had seen miracles of healing, a storm calmed - people raised from the dead-- and still they were unsure AND OFTEN not very demonstrative of their listening to the Messiah. They had eyes to see - and ears to hear FIRST HAND. And yet there was a denying Peter and doubting Thomas - not to mention the other ten.

And so Jesus takes us ALONG with Peter and James and John to a high mountain. And there Jesus is transformed - he is transfigured and is revealed beyond physical description. At that very moment, the disciples hear a voice, saying: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.

My friends, there could NO LONGER be any doubt for Peter, James, and John - even though Peter did succumb in the Garden.

Transfiguration was the moment of TRANSFORMATION for these three disciples. Peter was so turned on by this moment that he wanted to make it a permanent situation by building booths for Moses, Elijah, & Jesus. These disciples now knew that God's power alone was the transforming power for life. And to listen RESPONSIVELY to Christ's message would give them the transforming power for their lives and relationships.

My Christian friends, nothing has changed since that mountain top experience of Peter, James, and John. God's power in Christ is still the only real transforming power for a people in a world beset by corruption - guilt - hunger - and all the other injustices and alienations of life.

Christ's message still is the ONE that transforms each of us. He says: Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads (namely - your guilt - your anger - whatever garbage you're carrying) and I will give you rest. . . . The yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."

It is easy and light because it is the yoke of compassion and forgiveness. It is a yoke we need to hear about - it is a message we need to listen to continually - and it is a lifestyle that we have to SHARE in order that life might be transformed -- MADE MORE BRILLIANT!

Yes - it is the message we have been given. And each of us has been transformed BY IT! AND IF WE DON'T FEEL TRANSFORMED, THEN WE HAVEN'T BEEN LISTENING...

~~But even after receiving the message, God does not tell us to stop listening. Because we need to be transformed every minute -- because every minute we're distracted by the barrier and distortions of life around us. So - let us continue to listen to him - so that we may respond as transformed - life-giving people Amen.~~

Since my return from Wisconsin, I have dealt with at least a half dozen situations eroding from bitterness, resentment, and indifference. Believe me, I know there are often legitimate reasons for bitterness. But there are more legitimate reasons for a transformation of that bitterness & resentment.

God enables us to TRANSFORM all the cancers of our lives BY LISTENING TO HIS SON -- and then applying his spirit to our lives. He assures us that the load will be lightened.

With such an offer, how can we possibly allow ourselves to be distracted by the barriers and distortions of our resentments. We can't afford TO STOP listening and responding to Christ's message. It is the one source of hope we have for our everyday lives.—

as well as our eternal lives. Amen/

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Last Sunday After Epiphany

Luth Church of the Master

Feb. 29, 1976

"PRESENTING - HIS MAJESTY"

"After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." Mark 9:2-3

A SHOWING FORTH of the Christ -- the MANIFESTATION of God as the light of the world -- the REVELATION of God's glory in Jesus -- or simply stated, Presenting, His Majesty. This is what Epiphany is all about -- this has been our focal point for the last eight weeks. This is the season in which the light that came INTO the world is PRESENTED to the world.

Eight weeks to confirm that God's glory is found in Jesus of Nazareth. He is God's majesty on earth. And so from his baptism to numerous examples of ^{his} ministry SHOWING FORTH God's power ~~in Jesus~~ to unify, to convert, to destroy demons, to heal, to bring in the outsider, to forgive sin -- AND NOW, to do what goes beyond rational explanation -- to glorify thru the transfiguration.

Epiphany - a time to assert God's glory and majesty active in the life of *a man - Jesus*.

A season that ends thru the retelling of the blast of light in the Transfiguration. Up to this point we've been able to follow the light of Epiphany -- we can comprehend the miracle of baptism, of healing, of forgiveness. We've all experienced these.

But now God throws in a mysterious *trip* -- the Transfiguration. What in the world is this? Wierd details about a bleaching light and the appearances of dead saints. What are we to make of this Transfiguration? What is it?

Let's face it -- I don't know, and neither do you. To tack a name onto a mystery of God does not explain it. We can give the transfiguration all kinds of synonyms, but it still remains a mystery.

I am not bothered by that fact, and I hope you're not either. I am perfectly happy to accept this event as a GLORIOUS & MAJESTIC happening of some sort -- a happening in which the glory of God was VISIBLY shown. To say more about the event would be MERE SPECULATION.

So - what do we do with it? If something is beyond rational explanation, do we just forget about it? Hopefully not. For there is revelation in even the most irrational. And God speaks EVEN through the irrational.

And that's exactly the first revelation of this text. Namely, God can use the irrational to show forth his glory. Whether a vision of blazing light or ecstatic recollection of the dead -- these can be signs of God reminding us that FAITH can be fortified even through the irrational.

But God also reminds us here that such experiences REMAIN our own building blocks -- these are not to be institutionalized. Peter wanted to institutionalize this mysterious event - he wanted to schroud it in tabernacles.

But God did not bless that agenda. The same is a reminder for our religious experiences and ecstasies today -- the ones that classify as irrational. To the extent that they fortify one's faith, they are fine. But they become a serious danger when forced upon other believers or non-believers.

Transfiguration teaches us that we cannot build tabernacles AROUND our own mysterious experiences AND THEN TRY TO MARKET THEM. Ecstatic experiences are personal ones -- not saleable to the general public -- but having great appreciation value for our faith.

But we are not left with only the -3-
irrational here ...

A second revelation shows itself in this mystical mountain top encounter. Throughout Epiphany, God has glorified Jesus ON THE ROAD OF LIFE. We have seen the majesty of God through Jesus in the valleys of misery and alienation -- in the "muck" of life.

The Transfiguration reveals that God's majesty is also found apart from the busyness and hassles of daily life. Transfiguration is the beacon which beckons us TO WITHDRAW in order to be fed.

Jesus was a busy minister among people, serving them with creative compassion and seeking to guide them to a new way of life. But he knew the necessity to withdraw - to withdraw for prayer, for communion with God -- a time to be given new energy and direction. Then he returned to the busy world, and immediately he ~~was~~ again involved with the needs and sufferings of people.

Prayer and work, withdrawal and involvement were the cycle of Jesus's life. The transfiguration announces the new lifestyle in Christ. The glory of Jesus on the high mountain, and the glory of Jesus in the valley below at work among people in need.

Such is the life of faith - always lived in a two-fold cycle of prayer and action, withdrawal and involvement. The Christ of the mountain must also be the Christ of the valley. The disciple of Sunday morning is also the disciple of Monday morning. The Christian worships on the Lord's day IN ORDER TO renew and strengthen his devotion and loyalty to Christ so that he can witness IN THE WAY HE LIVES, TALKS, CARES on Monday.

The Christian withdraws to worship, and then goes forth to serve. *Which leads to the 3rd revelation.*
that the Xan

Finally - the Transfiguration reveals [^]listens to God's Son, whether he's on the mountain top or in the valley.

Jesus not only heard and listened to his father on the mountain top or at Gethsemane, he listened along the road to Golgatha and even to the bitter last moment on the cross. He lived a transfigured life.

The transfiguration points us in the same direction. It is easy to be forgiving and loving on the mountain top, but the real challenge always confronts us in the valleys -- the valleys of death, suffering, bitterness, and depression. Those are the moments that Christ beckons us to listen more closely.

During the past week and a half, I have been close to one who has shown me this LISTENING TO CHRIST -- esp. while in the valley. For it was this persons misfortune to be violently shoved from the mountain top into a deep valley of depression. Not gently pushed, but cruelly kicked over the edge.

For me, and for many, this could have been the occasion for a brooding and eternal assault. Granted - there has been anger and depression for this person, but that has been TRANSFIGURED by a countinuing countenance of Christ 's love and compassion.

I can only believe that this TRANSFIGURATION has been possible for this man because HE HAS REGULARLY listened to the son of God. He has regularly withdrawn TO WORSHIP, and regularly gone forth to serve EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE VALLEYS OF LIFE. *God's glory + majesty active in the life of a man,*

All these examples may not explain that brilliant light on the mountain top, but they all reveal what it means to glorify God -- to present his majesty.

Each of us has been shown the light of the world -- each of us has listened to the Son of God -- so each of us can go forth TRANSFIGURED (Made entirely new) to serve God and our fellow human beings. This is the RATIONAL purpose for Epiphany and the transfiguration.

AMEN

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
February 20, 1977

"PATENT PENDING"

"And even if the gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God."
2 Cor. 4:3-4

At our Life with God class last Thursday night, one participant rightly said that too often our theology implies a Black or White absolutism. That is, we sometimes speak as if our human condition warrants either absolute salvation or absolute damnation. That either "black or white" position is known as classical dualism -- a position often promoted by more fundamentalistic sects.

Well, thank God for members of the class who forced a clarification of the issue. In fact, one member said that we are in a "pending" position -- either pending salvation or damnation. That's really a very insightful description -- and a very Biblical one.

Luther called it "simul justus et peccator," which means, simultaneously being saved yet still sinful.

But of course Luther recognized the danger of this basic doctrine of his. From it, you or I could easily conclude that if we are both accepted by God and at the same time judged for our sin --- then we might just as well go on "sinning." Cause after all, God will accept us anyway -- we might as well enjoy our sinful side.

Obviously, Luther had no intention of promoting that kind of heresy. He knew, and we know that Jesus Christ called us to be decisive disciples. So as much as it is false to say that our response to God's love is either black or white--

it is equally false to claim that our response is just a neutral issue -- equally false to claim that we can come down on either God's side or sin's side and it doesn't really matter.

That brings us back to Paul's proclamation of the Word in today's second lesson. Essentially, Paul is trying to help us determine here which way we find ourselves moving. He says we are either leaning toward the light or drifting back into darkness. But there's no neutral ground.

So, although God's love is forever offered, we are either moving toward it or away from it. And Paul goes on to say that JUST IN HEARING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST we can only be moving toward the light. But not without struggle. For he also says that the god of this world is constantly trying to veil or snuff out that light.

Without a doubt, that should make sense to every committed Christian. There should not be one of us who's daily life is without the struggle between the "light" and the "darkness." But after Thursday's class, I realize I can no longer assume that this is true. So let's try a parabolic illustration from our own day.

On the western slopes of the Rockies, a giant Sequoia lies rotting on the ground. I'm told that this tree was a growing sapling when Christ walked the shores of Galilee. Imagine, a tree over 2000 years old -- a tree that was just reaching maturity when Columbus discovered America. Moreover, that tree for centuries had withstood ravages of fires, floods, storms, and droughts.

Then a few years ago a tiny beetle burrowed into the bark of this tree and laid its eggs. Ah well - what's one little beetle?!? But that one beetle in a very short time multiplied into millions. And in a matter of months those beetles had worked to the heart of the tree.

Then one day, after withstanding the elements for centuries, a thunderstorm blew up and the giant Sequoia fell. And it wasn't the storm that caused the fall; it was the weakening effect of those beetles.

That Sequoia might be compared to man or woman. Even greater than the Sequoia, man is a beautifully intricate creation of God. And for most of us, God creates us with a tremendous strength at birth and through the developing years. It's literally amazing the abuse that children can take, both physically and emotionally, without terminal damage.

But like that Sequoia, as man matures he becomes much more appetizing for the beetle (obviously representing the evil power, or god of this world). It is that little beetle -- just that one little god of this world -- that often first penetrates our lives as adolescents.

Yes, that first beetle in the teen years is often so small -- maybe just a small obsession with clothes or making money. Maybe that beetle is the ability to lie just enough so that I can get away with deceiving my family. Yes - how small that first beetle is -- surely it can't be terminal.

But that little god always lays its eggs. And if they are given an environment to survive in -- they will multiply like mosquitos. And soon we have an adult who has not only shut God out of his life -- but who is now controled by the rats, and roaches, and beetles that have taken over the very core of his being. Those little gods of greed, and jealousy, and arrogance, and idolatry are now in authority.

And then the storm rolls in -- a major crisis in life. And down goes the person with it. Not because the storm was so intense -- but because there was nothing eternal left inside. All that was left were the little gods of this world -- the things that die, the things that rot like anything else in creation.

So Paul says - Our gospel is veiled ONLY to those who are perishing. Notice, they haven't perished yet, but Paul definitely sees them going in that direction. He continues - in their case, the god of this world has blinded their minds to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel -- Jesus Christ, who is the likeness of God.

So again - there is no neutral ground. We are wither turning to the light of Jesus Christ, or drifting back into the darkness created by worshipping the gods around us.

And note again - Paul does not paint us as either IN THE BLACK or IN THE WHITE -- as in total light or total darkness. But God through Paul is saing that each of us is moving toward the light or away from it. Our patent is still pending. God loves and promises eternal life -- but the final approval is not given until he has observed our life stance toward him.

And in the next verse, Paul gives the clue to our life stance. "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants."

Nothing could be clearer. The life stance God asks for is that in the midst of life's struggles that we continue to listen to him through his son. Paul makes clear that we who are listening to the Word of Christ are moving toward the light.

No matter how bad we think we've been -- no matter how awful our past sins, the fact that we're hearing the Word means that the light is overcoming the darkness.

"This is my son, my chosen, listen to him." That's all it takes to be transfigured -- changed into Christ's servants. Not instantly, Not perfectly. But that's the direction we're moving in when we listen to Him.

And obviously, that means quite simply that

anyone not listening to Him is moving toward darkness. Not dammed yet -- but on the way down the tube. Not because I say so -- but because God says so.

But God calls us to be his sources of light for anyone moving toward darkness. We are to serve in love, and to invite them to hear Him. Not because we claim greater righteousness -- but because we can't resist sharing the light.

My dear friends, several offerings of the light are available here right NOW -- whether the LIFE WITH GOD series or the Lenten Book Corner or the Home Lenten Study. Each of these helps you and me and anyone we invite MOVE closer to the light.

Thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

AMEN

TRANSFIGURATION
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
Feb. 5, 1978

"FROM THE MOUNTAIN, TO THE VALLEY..."

"After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, ... And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead." Matt. 17:1,9

Mountaintops are magnificent. I've never been on anything higher than the Rockies -- but I can truly understand how John Denver can come up with the line "Rocky Mountain high" after being on the Rockies. I can also understand the thrill of mountaintop skying -- or just the sensation of peering from the top of the Sears Tower in Chicago. Its only a very dull person who doesn't feel thrilled while perched atop a great mountain or sky-scraper.

Well - evidently God likes mountaintops too. We are told that Moses spent 40 days/40 nights on the mountain. Its obvious that it takes God longer to carve out two stone tablets than to make several thousand Xerox copies for more modern followers. Of course, we also encounter Jesus on mountains seeming to find it a more prayerful place - away from the hustle-bustle of the marketplace. And again today - our text relates that Jesus went with Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain.

Yes - no doubt that God likes mountaintops. But on this mountaintop, a particularly strange thing happened. Jesus was transfigured (which means totally changed in physical appearance)... and that was also a transfiguring moment for Peter, James, and John. Never again would their religious lives be quite the same. They had seen and experienced God's presence in a way that nobody else would ever know. God had visited them in a very unique way... on the mountaintop.

Wow! What an experience that must have been. And we all know how Peter responded to the whole thing. He wanted to enshrine Jesus, Moses, and Elijah for everyone to see - now and forever more! Good ole Peter comes through with his true humanness again. This was it for him -- he was ready to camp out on the mountain forever. Yes - we call him the great disciple OFTEN forgetting that he regularly played the part of COWARDLY disciple.

Here was Peter - again RETREATING from the reality of life and ministry -- "retreat" here meaning "running away from." He wanted life on earth TO BE FOREVER TRANSFIGURED, from this moment to eternity. He was saying "Come on Jesus, let's stay up here and forget about the problems of the world around us."

Society (esp. the religious world) hasn't changed too much, has it, in nearly 2000 years. From the turbulence and sometimes misguided activism of the 60's -- God's followers have decided to sound the trumpet of retreat in the 70's. Today - "the in thing in religion" is to make it a shelter from the realities of life.

All we need do is look at the well packaged and promoted varieties of religion today to see what's selling the best. And you only have to go as far as the TV GUIDE to find the answers to all the ~~problems~~ ^{problems} of Christianity. The religious groups that are making today are the ones that promise a mountaintop experience EVERY TIME YOU TRY THEIR BRAND.

People in the 70's want a religion that gives PERSONAL ENRICHMENT, PERSONAL ENJOYMENT, AND PERSONAL SATISFACTION without any PAIN. They want Christianity without the cross. And you know and I know that there are a lot of popular cults today that are selling so-called Christianity without the cross.

Just promise a ROCKY-MOUNTAIN-HIGH every week, and you'll get lots of followers. So - you put together a good jazz band -- a very good-looking

group of singers who are clean-cut and sing sentimental songs, along with stereo speakers and a preacher wearing the latest fashions from Hart, Schaefer and Marx -- and you have created one dynamic emotional-devotional setting. But all this is nothing new. In the name of religion -- there have always been opportunists who have successfully manipulated sincere Christians into mountain top experiences.

But God help us when we dilute his Word into the gushy feelings that come with human highs -- whether caused by groovy music nature's mountain tops.

The real testimonies of Peter, James, & John were not their testimonies about the transfiguration. In fact - Jesus tells them to be quiet about this mountain top experience until AFTER his resurrection. The real testimonies of Peter, James, and John (and other faithful followers) are the fruits of their faith as lived out in life's valleys. The real issue is: How did they show the mercy and grace of God under the normal trials and tribulations of life?? Their mountain top experience was quite all right and necessary -- but only so that they might be strengthened for their ministry in the valley.

We're reminded of that when we look at what surrounds this story in Matthew's gospel. Six days before this experience - Jesus chastised Peter for his unwillingness to accept the fact that Jesus would soon die. Jesus actually calls Peter "Satan," and then says to all of them: "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me." That hardly seems like an invitation for an ego-trip.

Likewise, just after the transfiguration - a man confronted Jesus with an epileptic son, asking Jesus to cure the boy. He said he had asked the disciples but they didn't do it. And Jesus again rebukes the disciples for their cynical faith.

Jesus is not implying here that ALL DISCIPLES will be great faith healers. But he is saying that too

offer
he finds his disciples saying: "That's impossible." And the word IMPOSSIBLE is not to be found in the faith dictionary. Because once you say IMPOSSIBLE - you're defeated before you begin.

uses
Jesus ~~says by~~ using the example of a mustard seed and a mountain: the impossible is possible only when we rely upon the love and mercy of God. That's not to say it WILL ALWAYS BE ACCOMPLISHED - but with God's spirit - IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE.

In plain English - Jesus says to his disciples THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN ESCAPE FROM THE VALLEYS OF LIFE. Whether Christian or heathen -- there are no retreats from life, which includes its pain. Jesus did not redeem life during his transfiguration -- he redeemed life on another hill -- namely, the hill of his crucifixion. There were no shortcuts in life for Jesus -- including the defeat of death. His life was not all mountaintops -- there was the wilderness and suffering as well as the joy and communion with friends.

The Transfiguration occurs between two very real valleys of life -- the valleys of cowardly fear and human illness. And that's where the story of the Christian faith hits the dirt. The story of Christianity is not a melodrama oozing with teary-eyed rocky-mountain highs. Rather, it's a story of God in the person of Jesus Christ living a real life in the valleys of life -- including the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus, Peter, James and John came down from the mountaintop and Jesus again said to them: take up your cross and follow me into the valleys of life. Things would never be quite as neat for Peter, James and John as they were on that mountaintop -- but they hung in there anyway -- cause that's what the Christian life is all about.

mmSo -- here we are again on the mountaintop --

it's hardly a Rocky-Mountain High, is it?? Esp with these dirty walls and hard steel chairs. But this is our modest mountaintop -- because this is where heaven touches the earth -- in the form of God's Word and Sacraments.

But like Peter, James and John -- we never live forever on the mountaintop -- the real healing and helping of the gospel takes place after we leave this so-called RETREAT-HOUSE. It's after leaving here that we find out if HEAVEN IS REALLY TOUCHING EARTH. Yes - out there in the valleys of our homes, our offices, our encounters with other people -- that's wherd we either transform lives with God's love or let them go to hell.

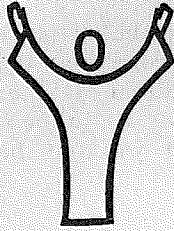
After having only 3 people show up last Monday night for calling on our neighbors -- I ~~was~~ really wondering how much of an impact God's word is having in this place. Maybe it's time for a new spokesperson. And yet, I dare not become a cynic like we're all tempted to become.

God will again and again and again give us opportunities to share his transforming love. And even beyond that -- thanks to God, ~~one~~ day he will even transfigure this sagging body into an everlasting spiritual body like Christs.

And in the meantime - until that day - his work goes on in the valley just because of folks like you and me. So He beckons us to continue to roll up our sleeves and do his spade work on earth. To be a light in dark places of guilt and despair -- and the salt of society that both preserves life and gives it real flavor.

He calls us NOT TO RETREAT within our mountaintop experiences - but rather to love, to serve, to help and to heal anyone needing ~~his~~ attention in the valleys. Christ lives NOW within us EVEN in the valleys -- so that we might live with Him forever on the mountaintop he has prepared for us in heaven.

AMEN



CELEBRATE

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD • February 5, 1978
The Last Sunday after the Epiphany

THE DAY

The climax of the Epiphany season is the festival of the Transfiguration, on which the church commemorates the brightest manifestation of Christ's glory in the apostles' experience. All three of today's lessons speak of the glory of God, in which Jesus "on the holy mountain" was engulfed.

THE CONFESSION OF SINS [The Act of Reconciliation]

Minister: Let us confess our sins before God and in the presence of one another.

A brief silence for individual prayer.

Assistant: Before your glorious presence, O Lord, we are but dust and ashes. We are not worthy to come before you and to speak to you.

All: **Save us, lest we perish!**

Assistant: We have marred and scarred your image in us; we have fallen far from your beauty and holiness; we have lost the brightness of your light and walk in darkness.

All: **Create in us new and contrite hearts.**

Assistant: We are often thinking of ourselves, scheming and plotting our own advantage and pleasure.

All: **Renew a right spirit within us.**

Assistant: We allow feelings of bitterness and revenge to arise within us; we grow hard and loveless.

All: **Heal us and bless us, good Lord.**

*Here may be offered other petitions,
the people responding, "Heal us and bless us, good Lord."*

Minister: God in his mercy forgives those who are penitent and fills us with the light and joy of his Son, Jesus Christ. Live in his light and so reflect his joy!

All: **Amen.**

Or the minister may conclude:

We are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ our Lord. Therefore, let us be reconciled with one another and share the peace of the Lord.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us with the King heirs of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE PSALMODY

Psalm 2:6-11; Refrain, verse 7b

For singing: *The refrain (R)* is introduced by choir or cantor. The congregation repeats the refrain. Choir or cantor sings psalm verses; congregation sings refrain as indicated. For reading: *Boldface lines are the responses. The refrain is read by the leader alone at the beginning and by all at the end.*



R/. The Lord said to me: You are my Son: this day have I be-got-ten you.

“I myself have set up my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: The Lord said to me,

“You are my son; this day I have begotten you. R/.

“Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance and the ends of the earth for your possession.

“You shall rule them with an iron rod; you shall shatter them like an earthen dish.” R/.

And now, O kings, give heed; take warning, you rulers of the earth.

Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him; with trembling pay homage to him. R/.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. R/.

THE LECTONARY

FIRST LESSON: Exodus 24:12, 15-18

THE LORD said to Moses, “Come up the mountain to me, and while you are here, I will give you two stone tablets which contain all the laws

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that I have written for the instruction of the people." . . .

Moses went up Mount Sinai, and a cloud covered it. The dazzling light of the Lord's presence came down on the mountain. To the Israelites the light looked like a fire burning on top of the mountain. The cloud covered the mountain for six days, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from the cloud. Moses went on up the mountain into the cloud. There he stayed for forty days and nights.

(TEV)

SECOND LESSON: 2 Peter 1:16-19 [20-21]

WE DID NOT follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. [First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.]

(CB)

GOSPEL: Matthew 17:1-9

AFTER SIX DAYS Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead."

(CB)

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[The Intercessions]

Minister: Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all persons according to their needs.

A brief silence for individual prayer.

Assistant: Lord Christ, renew your Church, so that your people may surrender themselves to the cause for which you lived and died and rose again.

All: **Pour out your Spirit on us, good Lord.**

Assistant: Lord Christ, as you did not remain on the holy mountain

or permit your disciples to do so, but went down with them to minister to a suffering humanity, so we ask you to help us use our moments of insight and vision that we may be strengthened for service to those in need.

All: Help us to fulfill our ministry.

Assistant: We remember before you, Lord God, all those in authority in every land, that they may be guided by your wisdom and seek to establish your justice.

All: Teach them to look to you for all they need, that they may glorify your name.

Assistant: We remember, Lord Christ, how you healed an epileptic child as soon as you had come down from the holy mountain. Heal and restore now those who are sick, or in any way distressed, so that they may give thanks to you in your Church. (Especially do we pray for . . ., that you will supply their need and bind them to yourself.)

All: Let the needy not be forgotten, O Lord.

Assistant: Finally we bless your name for Moses and Elijah and all the prophets, for Peter and Paul and all the apostles, and for all who by their words and works were faithful to you in their generation. Lead us also in trust and obedience, that we with all your people may come to that excellent glory made known to us in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Here may be offered other intercessions and thanksgivings.

Minister: Into your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

TRANSFIGURATION

Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy

Feb. 25, 1979

"NO COVER UPS!"

".. Because for us there is no veil over the face, we all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord; thus, we are transfigured into his likeness, from splendour to splendour; such is the influence of the Spirit." II Cor. 3:11-12

Robert Lewis Stevenson told the story of a ship that was in grave distress in a storm. The passengers were terrified! One of them - quite against the orders of the ship - slipped up to the deck and made his way to the pilot's quarters.

The pilot seaman was at his post at the wheel. He caught a glimpse of the frightened passenger peering in at him - and simply gave the passenger a reassuring smile.

Returning to the other passengers below, the frightened man calmly announced: "I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled. All is well."

A simple smile from the pilot had the power of reassuring a whole ship of frightened passengers. As some of you know - last summer I was caught in a similar storm in a 30' sailboat. And the pilot of that ship did the same thing -- he kept on reassuring his crew of three people that we were going to make it.

There was no veil over the faces of these pilots -- instead they reflected the look of confidence -- they reflected the splendour of the Lord. They did not let the veil of gloom and doom hang over them -- instead, they took charge -- they became transfigured into the image of God -- they radiated confidence and love and reassurance -- they used the gifts that the Spirit of God had given them -- and so they transfigured a very dismal situation into the splendour of the Lord.

In Breslau, Germany - the mother of Charles Steinmetz died when he was a mere infant. His grandmother had to raise him. But she was a special grandma! With patient devotion - she gave herself to that tiny, hunchback child.

She read him Bible Stories - esp. from the OT. Among them was the story of the eternal light in the ancient Jewish temple.... a strange light, unfueled that never burned out.

This poor, deformed boy was fascinated by that image. His mind took hold of it and never let it go. Stirred by the glory of that glowing light, Charles Steinmetz immigrated to America and became an outstanding professor and scholar -- and inventor and pioneer in electronics. He remains today as one of the prime movers in the founding of the General Electric Company.

What is significant is that Charles Steinmetz allowed a vision of God's eternal light to remove the veil from his life. This deformed, hunchback boy could have felt sorry for himself for an entire lifetime. He could have concentrated on his deformities -- on his limitations -- on all the ridicule that he must have received as a child.

But instead - he let a vision of God's splendour transform his life. He let God take hold of his imperfect little body and transfigure his life into a GREAT INSTRUMENT OF SERVICE TO MANKIND! Through this hunchback man-- the splendour of the Lord SHINED -- and continues to shine upon many generations.

Likewise came the man from Nazareth. He lived in a society that had COVERED UP the splendour of the Lord. His own people had not only COVERED UP the splendour of life with prejudice and immorality --- but they had taken God's LAW

and made it into a SUFFOCATING SYSTEM OF RULES. Instead of the love of the Lord shining through the lives of people -- people would pick at one another -- trying to discredit one another FOR NOT FULFILLING THE 618 CEREMONIAL LAWS OF THE DAY. Instead of the law leading humanity to their Lord -- it was covering up the whole intention of God.

It was for that reason that Paul says in this lesson: "every time the Law of Moses is read, a veil lies over the minds of the hearers." The Law was stifling the Spirit of God -- instead of showing God in all his loving splendour!

Jesus' own people - the Jews - were guilty of a gross COVER UP -- they had put a veil over the splendour of God's creative and redemptive gifts.

We all know the temptation to cover up the splendour of God! Every human being has fallen into the pit of this sinful trap. Many times you and I have given in to the gloominess of life -- instead of letting God transform our lives into instruments of hope - of reassurance - of confident love!

For instance - what do we do when one of our members gets into a jam? Do we go to that person's aid - whether that person is innocent or guilty? Do we offer a hand of help -- or like the rest of the slanderous world -- do we just sit around gossiping about the misfortune of that person.

That's the question that Jesus asks today: do we help God remove the veil from life -- do we help transfigure the lives of those around us? Or do we push them further into a rut of despair and hopelessness??

Well - Paul makes quite clear the direction the church is to be pointed to -- he says: for us there is no veil over the face, we all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord; thus, we are transfigured into his likeness.

We may not be there all the time -- but that's the direction that God is pointing us to -- he is always pointing us toward himself - toward his splendour and away from our self-pity -- toward his magnificent mercy and away from our self-deciet and depression. He is always seeking to remove the veil that we have covered up with --

And so he asks you and me directly today:
IS THERE A VEIL COVERING UP YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW that prevents you from seeing the splendour of the Lord? What have we let get between ourselves and the uplifting splendour of our Lord?

I'll bet there are some people in this room who are letting this new hymnal get between them and the splendour of Christ!?! How ridiculous!

I'll bet there are others who have let their loneliness get between them and the splendour of God's love! Well - here's a whole church full of people -- let them make you feel loved by God!!

Yes - God's power of forgiving love is present at this moment and every moment TO REMOVE WHATEVER VEIL you have allowed to come between you and him. He has called his church to be his instrument of reassurance -- to be that smile which reassures you that LIFE IS A MANY SPLENDERE THING -- and that life in Christ is living forever transfigured -- forever exalted by the Spirit of God's reassuring kindnesses!!

AMEN

TRANSFIGURATION

Hope Lutheran, Toledo

February 17, 1980

"FROM THE MOUNTAINS, TO THE VALLEYS..."

"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 countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white.

Luke 9:29-29

Mountaintops are magnificent! I've never been on anything higher than the Rockies - but I can understand why John Denver sings "Rocky Mountain High" after being on those mountains.

Possibly you've had that same feeling if you've been watching the Olympics these past few days. Watching the skiers maneuver hair pin turns on the Adirondikes is truly breathtaking. ~~I'm certain it's even more majestic to be standing on the top of that ski hill all alone.~~

Yes - mountaintops are magnificent. But not only for you and me. God and his great leaders have always had a great affinity for mountains. The great revelations of God's will have almost always occurred on mountaintops.

Abraham is told by God to take his son, Issac, to a high place or mountain in the land of Moriah. Moses receives the Decalogue - 10 Commandments - on Mount Sinai. God revealed himself to the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel and Mount Sinai. And of course, throughout Jesus' ministry -- mountains play a key role in revelation -- beginning with his Sermon on the mount and concluding with his death on Calvary.

Theologically - mountaintops are very special and very essential places in the scriptures. It's almost as if God realizes that his people must have a place to get away from the hustle & bustle, as well as the routine of life. Mountaintops become the place of special insight, or dramatic

glory; they are places set apart for the deep communication of prayer, and for the visionary revelations of God. Likewise, they often become the places where God gives his most profound instruction to his people.

Yes - mountaintops are not only geographically magnificent; they are theologically majestic!! So it is that the gospel writers take us along with Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration. It was on this mountain that Jesus prayerfully tuned in with God. Jesus needed a time to withdraw from the routine of daily life; he needed a transfiguring moment; he needed a time to find out if he was still "on course" with God; he needed a mountaintop experience. Likewise, he wanted to share this with his three most trusted disciples!

---- WAS SHOWN TO BE CHRIST!

Dear friends in Christ -- there is a great practical truth in the Transfiguration: We all need moments of transfiguration!! Every one of our lives is daily threatened by becoming weary, by becoming flat and stale; by becoming routinized and boring. This is especially true in our faith lives.

Life with God can become stale and routine! If our faith is going to remain vital and active -- then we need mountaintop events now and then. Ideally - that is what worship is supposed to be all about! It is supposed to be that moment where we ascend the mountain to prayerfully be with God -- to hear his words of revelation, of hope, of forgiveness, of instruction. Worship is ideally that moment of being on the mountaintop -- of being uplifted!
by voice of God

Yet - we all know that doesn't happen every time we worship. In fact, my catechism class recently told me that as far as they're concerned-- they rarely experience a mountaintop in worship.

In some ways - those catechism students are absolutely correct. Sometimes our worship does seem to be like a funeral dirge. Sometimes our prayers, our songs, and even our faces CONVEY A VERY DISMAL VIEW OF GOD. Yes, sometimes our worship simply does not transfigure us - it does not show the light and glory of God.

But so often we think the cure for this absence of ecstasy will happen by just changing the heat of our worship. Nothing could be further from the truth. Bringing a DISCO HEAT into worship is not going to give us a lasting mountaintop experience.

God's remedy for the routine - the stale - the boring and flat periods of life IS TO LISTEN TO AND OFFER HIS WORD. Those were God's words on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

The words of Jesus Christ are always uplifting. They are always words of hope, words of healing, words of forgiveness, words of mercy.

We live in a world where we daily encounter words of condemnation - words of anger - words of war -- words of worry and frustration -- words of resentment -- words of empty promises -- words filled with rhetoric and lies. Is it any wonder that life often goes stale and flat-- is it any wonder that people are sick and starving? Life in the valley is often full of ~~hell~~ *empty words & promises.*

Or as Paul said in today's 2nd lesson: The gospel of Jesus Christ is often veiled in the valley of life. Because in the valleys of life, we are blinded by the gods of this world -- whether these gods be material things or the routine hassles, hardships or handicaps of life. Our great temptation is to make the darkness of the valleys of life THE VERY SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF LIFE.

And that's why Jesus and every one of us needs to be called out of the valleys into the mountains TO PRAY and LISTEN TO GOD. That's why I need to ascend God's mountaintop of worship every Sunday (if not more often) -- because I need to listen to his Word, especially after hearing all the destructive and divisive and degrading words *that we all hear + say each week.*

Yes - Even though this hour of worship may not be as great as the Mount of Transfiguration or Mount Sinai; even though it may not be as transfiguring this week without a 75-voice choir; even though it may not swing with a wild disco beat -- it is still that moment that God gives us to be uplifted by his Word -- to be on a mountain with Him and hear some good news -- to hear that we are one with him now and forever, regardless of what happens in the valleys of life.

*forgiving
healing
uplifting*

Yes - this little mountaintop of worship is truly magnificent when we come to it ready and willing to pray -- and prayer is always more a willingness to listen, than to be heard. Yes - for all those little mountaintop moments with God -- whether they occur here, or in a hospital room, or at a retreat setting, or in the living room at home -- thanks be to God for those moments when we listen to his words, because those are the times when our lives are truly transfigured!

And God only knows we need those moments -- because we cannot live on the mountaintop forever. Peter wanted to build three booths on the mount of transfiguration; he wanted to hold onto that experience; he wanted to stay up there on the mountain and totally escape from the hassles of the valley below.

But Jesus doesn't even respond to his elementary notion of discipleship. Jesus instead (esp in Matthew) points the disciples

in the direction of Calvary. In Matthew's gospel -- they descend the mountain and go down into the valley where Jesus says: "Now, take up your cross and follow me."

The message is absolutely clear. The life of discipleship is not a life of escape on the mountaintops. The mountaintops are necessary for inspiration and guidance -- but the Christian life is lived out in the valleys. Jesus is clearly saying -- there are no escapes from the hassles and pains of life for the Christian. In fact, Christ calls us to be his hands of mercy and compassion for those suffering in the valleys of life.

But we go into those valleys equipped with the uplifting word of Christ. And no matter how dismal the valleys may be -- even death itself is not victorious over our relationship with God. And that's the good news that we carry with us into the valleys of life -- just as Jesus carried that with him as he looked forward to the Cross of Calvary.

Thank God -- that we have come FROM HIS MOUNTAIN -- always prepared to walk through the valleys of life, even the valley of the shadow of death, where his rod and staff will forever comfort us.

To HIS +

(HIS WORD + HIS LOVE)

AMEN

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD
The last Sunday after the Epiphany
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
February 21, 1982

"UNVEILED VISION"

"...when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. ...And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

II Corinthians 3:16b,18

Bridal veils have become less popular among many brides in recent years -- at least that has been my experience in officiating for weddings. But the bridal veil was once an important and dramatic part of the bridal trousseau. She would enter the sanctuary with veiled face making it difficult for both groom and congregation to view the full loveliness of her face. And as the veil was lifted before the vows, there was a heightened moment of transfiguration -- the bride could now be seen in the fulness of her cosmetic beauty. That was a very special moment for both bride and groom.

Surely the bridal veil is a positive application of the use of veils. But there are many veils with more negative implications. For instance, fog is surely a veil over the environment. But this veil serves little or no good. It creates great dangers for all forms of travel as well as pedestrians. The end result of the veil of fog is always frustration and too often tragedy.

Likewise, pollution and smoke-filled rooms. Not only do these veils pose hazards to the smoker, they also putrefy the lungs and clothing of non-smokers. Smoke, whether from mouth or stack, generally serves as a veil of destruction.

And then there are the veils of illness and handicaps. Like fog or smoke-filled rooms, the veil of illness often distorts or clouds the lives of those under its cover. The veil of sickness precipitates its

fair share of negative results -- whether it be a momentary shower of self-pity or the long-term darkness of death.

To live under the veil of illness is to look above for a healing light. Such was literally the case for Charles Steinmetz, born in Breslau, Germany as a premature, deformed child, whose mother died shortly after his birth. But Charles was blessed with one of those special grandmothers who raised him. With great patience and devotion, she gave herself tirelessly to this tiny, hunchbacked child.

One of her greatest pasttimes was reading him Bible stories, esp from the O.T. Among them was the story of the eternal light in Exodus and Leviticus where Moses was commanded to keep the light always burning in the tabernacle.

The image of an eternal light proved to be fascinating for this deformed, little boy. As Steinmetz became a young man, he was still so stired by this "glowing light" fantasy that he immigrated to America. He became an outstanding professor and scholar, moreoever, an inventor and pioneer in electronics. He remains today one of the prime movers in the founding of General Electric.

What is significant is that Charles Steinmetz allowed a vision of God's eternal light to remove the veil from his life. This deformed, hunchback had every reason to feel sorry for himself. He could have concentrated of his deformities and limitations; he could have allowed the childhood ridicule to become the focus of his life.

But not so! Instead he let a vision of God's light transform his life. He let God take his imperfect body and transfigure his life into a GREAT INSTRUMENT OF SERVICE TO HUMANITY. He allowed the splendour of God's light to shine through the imperfection of his body.

And what did people see in Charles Steinmetz. True, they saw an imperfect body, but they saw so much more. They saw an imperfect man with the veil of self-pity removed a man who had beheld God's glory in something as simple as light -- a man who was being changed into the likeness of God's glroy.

Charles Steinmetz lived out the words of St. Paul: "when a man turns to God, the veil is removed." Charles Steinmetz remained a hunchback, but his life purpose was not determined by the veil of deformity. God had removed the veil at the moment that Charles realized that he could use his life to serve others. Charles Steinmetz had been transfigured by God... he had been changed into the likeness of Christ.

And that is precisely Paul's point to the Corinthians and each of us today. In Jesus Christ we have an unveiled vision of God. In Jesus Christ we gain a new perspective on life; life is no longer merely a physical thing -- no longer will the superficial, outer-man cover up (veil) the real beauty of the inner man (life's purpose). In Christ, the superficial veils of life are removed and we get to the real heart of things - namely, our purpose for being here - to love, serve and enjoy God and one another.

Is it any wonder then that Jesus constantly fought with his own religious community, the 1st century Jews. This religious community had veiled the heart of God with prejudice and immorality -- and even worse, they had turned God's law of love into a suffocating system of rules.

No longer was loving God and neighbor at the heart of their religion -- faithfulness had become the fulfillment of 613 ceremonial laws. Is it any wonder why religion had become a burden and offense in Ancient Israel?! The splendour of God's love had been lost in the shuffle of laws.

Now you can understand why Paul says in today's lesson "everytime the Law of Moses is read, a veil lies over the minds of the hearers." The ceremonial law (which might be compared to the canon law of Roman Catholicism today) had stifled the Spirit of God. Is it any wonder that Jesus was rejected? Likewise - we can now see why Peter, James, and John went up the mountain -- they needed God's confirmation that Jesus was the real thing - the Messiah.

The temptation to cover-up...to veil the splendour of God and his purpose IS STILL VERY REAL TODAY. Justice and equality continue to be veiled by prejudice in our society.

Likewise, all nations continue to live behind the iron curtain of greed. Whether in Poland, El Salvador, or the U.S., official policy too often reward the rich and denies the poor. Almighty God becomes veiled behind almighty greed. And this veil distorts our view of others -- causing us to slander them rather than serving their needs ... causing us to build up nuclear arms rather than fighting the good fight of faith ... causing us to keep more for ourselves while we watch cities and countries deteriorate around us.

We often justify this by saying, "well, that's just the way things are in the real world;" but we fail to remember this is not our world, it is God's world, and greed does not reflect the splendour of his love in the world.

Yes - like the Jews of old, we are tempted to veil the splendour of God. We are tempted to veil God's Word behind our own physical needs and comforts. We are tempted to cover up the splendour of God's forgiveness by heaping guilt upon ourselves or others.

But God will not have us continue these in ways. He has good news for us. In Jesus Christ, the veil has been removed. We see clearly that God is not vindictive and judgmental; to those who confess and believe in him; we see that God is not punitive and angry with those who seek him; we see that God is not detached and distant to those who share his Body as the Communion of saints.

God has given us UNVEILED VISION -- a clear perception of himself and his purpose. God has given us more than 20/20 vision -- because he has shown us that there's more than physical realities to life. Unveiled vision beholds the glory of God and see that we are being changed into his likeness even at this very moment.

Unveiled vision enables us to see that we are not yet perfect -- that we still have reason to confess our sins -- but that we are becoming more like Christ everyday.

For us the veil is removed. Yesterday is forgiven, and tomorrow is filled with possibilities ... because every new day enables us to experience anew the splendour of God's love.

The veil has been removed. Unveiled vision means there is nothing to cover up before God or one another. For the sight of Christ has given us new insight. Doubt has been overtaken by renewed certainty. Beyond what our eyes can see is the reality of our God who holds the universe in his embrace. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

No one is any longer a stranger, but everyone is a neighbor to be loved. Life is a precious gift to be honored and cherished.

The veil has been removed ... and we are being changed into the likeness of Christ from one degree of glory to another. And neither death nor life ... nor things present nor things to come ,, , will be able to separate us from the love of God in that same Christ.

AMEN

2/13/83

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY
The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"A VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP"

"For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." II Cor. 4:5

The gospel story of Jesus' ascent with Peter, James and John up Mount Hermon and his transfiguration before them.

+ + + + + ++ +

Very few people would describe Hyde Park, Chicago, as a mountaintop of the midwest. It is in the midst of Chicago's south side. It is surrounded by urban blight on all sides but the east, where it empties into Lake Michigan. Like much of Chicago's south side, it is congested, heavily black, terribly grimy, and very rarely a high point for Chicagoland sight-seers. Geographically and aesthetically -- it is hardly an awe-inspiring mountaintop.

But in the heart of Hyde Park this past week -- in two different facilities -- more than 400 Lutheran laity, pastors, bishops, and theologians from Alaska to Geneva Switzerland deliberated for more than 50 hours the future of the Lutheran church. Fifteen major papers were presented over those five-days; the 350 seminar participants responded to those 15 papers by drafting 12 position papers. The 12 papers were then issued to the Commission for the New Lutheran Church which was meeting concurrently at the Hyde Park Hilton.

It was an exhausting but deeply exhilarating week. Each day's official program began at 8:30 a.m. and concluded at 9:30 p.m., broken only by lunch, dinner and brief coffee breaks. The unofficial conference continued each night beyond midnight at various Hyde Park pubs. Many of us stole away from the conference at the Luth School of Theology and sat in on the Commission for the New Lutheran Church. Never before in my pastoral ministry have I experienced so many of the church's most gifted minds in one place. Not only were all seminaries of the LCA, ALC and AELC represented, but even some of the best minds from the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Cath churches.

Most weeks of the year Hyde Park reflects the urban tension of south Chicago -- but last week the glory of God was shining through that grimy

and gafferous neighborhood. The light of Christ was shining out of the darkness of Hyde Park. those moments together provided participants with a VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP -- Christ was glorified even amidst his divided church. Without exception and regardless of denomination or position in the church -- every participant I talked to left the conference on a religious high. Like Peter, James and John -- we were treated by God to a view from the mountaintop -- a moment to observe and experience his uplifted glory.

If that conference reflects the future of the Lutheran church -- then God has truly blessed us with some of his most gifted and committed thinkers and servants.

I'm sure it's obvious- I am deeply grateful to have been a participant. But regardless of our life-calling -- we all need mountaintop moments. Whether its it a seminary - a marriage retreat - a vacation in the sunny south -- a new job opportunity or promotion -- or even a television special like "the Winds of War" --- we all need periodic, uplifting experiences -- we need to be taken up to a mountaintop for a refreshing view of our life, our work, and our reason for being here.

Life in the valleys of routine and business as usual can get pretty depressing. We need moments where God's presence and love and compassion radiates more graphically -- moments where our senses can become tantalized by God's renewal and reformation.

How mundane life would be without occasional views from the mountaintops. Is it any wonder that both the Old and New Testament reflect God's great revelations from mountaintops. There's Mount Sinai, and the Mount of Beatitudes, and Mount Hermon, and Mount Nebo, and even Jerusalem itself set high on a mountain. Scripture makes clear that God's followers need to see him anew from the mountaintop.

But like the experience of Peter, James, and John -- there can be real dangers when God graphically glorifies himself. For like Peter - our temptation in those moments is to bask in the glory and totally lose sight of the real earthly terrain of God's mission. In the context of Hyde park, our temptation this past week was to make all those holy thoughts about God and his people the ultimate expression! Likewise, in the context of Hope Church, our temptation is to make the words and actions of worship the essence of our faith and ministry. Whether the mountaintop is Transfiguration or the top spot in the corporation -- the real danger is to get up on high and then think that there is where the real action is.

Dr. Melvin Vos, professor at Muhlenberg College and speaker at the conference said -- "Give the average group of church members several photographs of life's realities. Then ask the group to identify those photographs which best show God's presence on earth. Almost without exception -- the group will choose pictures of beautiful mountains and verdant, flowing streams. But they will not identify those pictures of God's presence in bed pans and jail cells -- in teenage struggles and sanitary pick-up -- in factory assembly and household cleaning. There," says Dr. Vos, "is where God's love becomes more than pretty sounding words and liturgies and music."

The point is obvious from our text today and from our own lives: too often we want to leave our religious life and convictions up on the mountaintops! We only want God to be alive on the mountaintop and in the sanctuary. We don't want to bring his presence and power with us into the valleys and streets and bargaining tables of the world. We're tempted to get sucked in by the false dichotomy that has been ruling the world and religious people for ages -- the dichotomy of the sacred and secular. That false dichotomy emphasizes that God is only present in certain places and certain things -- it denies the fact that God is present wherever his people are present.

We've all heard people say -- "the church shouldn't be here or there -- or the most recent statement - "the church shouldn't be involved in the World Council. If we take seriously our baptismal faith -- then God and his church is everywhere -- and God and his church is especially needed where there is hunger and injustice caused by totalitarian rulers. God seeks to be God not only on mountaintops and sanctuaries -- but also at cocktail parties and golf courses -- in board rooms and classrooms -- in Asia, Africa and America. God seeks to be God everywhere -- either being glorified by you and me ... or being rejected by you and me.

A Pennsylvania truck driver recently said at a seminar for laity -- "All my life I've had it wrong. I thought I was in the world to go to church. But in fact, I'm in the church to go to the world."

That's the whole point of the Transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountaintop IN ORDER THAT THEY WOULD BE BETTER COMMITTED AND EQUIPPED TO GLORIFY HIM IN THE WORLD. But Peter wanted the payoff of God's glory without the cost of discipleship. He saw the mission of Christ as a retreat from the world rather than a commission TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD!

The Transfiguration of Jesus announces the transformation of ministry in the world. Ministry in the world is not merely getting high through hearing great theologians or sitting among an august commission to form a new church. Ministry in the world is ~~TRANSFORMING~~ a view from the mountaintop INTO A MEANINGFUL, SELF-GIVING SERVICE TO HUMANITY. Transfiguration is glimpsing God's glory and then giving it to the world!

St. Paul says it even clearer: "We do not preach ourselves, but we preach Christ crucified, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." We are not in this Christian ministry business for our self-glory-- but rather to glorify the self-giving, sacrificial love of Jesus Christ."

All the great theology and ecclesiology of this past week in Chicago will mean nothing if it remains lofty words of great thinkers. All the good sermons and musical praise of worship mean nothing if they are just eloquent sounds floating through our ears and up to the rooftops of sanctuaries. As one pastor shared this week -- he often hears members say: "Thank you, pastor - that was a good sermon." He regularly responds: "I'm glad you liked it, but it's still a little early to tell how good it really was."

The goodness of God's glory must move from the mountaintops to the hiways and homes where we live. The greatest challenge facing the new Lutheran church is to develop ministries that get beyond the words and lofty thoughts of New York, Minneapolis, Chicago, and other so-called mountaintops. Likewise - the same challenge faces Hope Church and every congregation -- the challenge of getting the glory of God from the sanctuary into the valleys and streets and homes and offices and factories of the world.

That challenge will not be met by the theologians and clergy of the church. That challenge will succeed best through the minds and hearts and hands of each of you -- for you are the ones that God has called to carry his word from the mountaintops into the valleys of the world.

The ministry of the people of God is much more than ushering and acolyting and lay reading and the many other churchly functions. These are all necessary -- but very secondary to the real task of discipleship. The real transfiguration of Christ is not the high of sermon or sanctuary - but the serving of Christ's self-giving love received here -- and then broken and shared in our daily lives.

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY (Last of Epiphany)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
February 14, 1988 (Valentine's Day)
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

" BE MINE ! "

And a voice said, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.

Mark 9:7-9

Valentine's Day, 1988! This is the day we say to our special loves, "BE MINE!" Valentine's Day is our society's "Mountaintop of Love." I would speculate that more candy, cards, and flowers are purchased on Valentine's Day than any other day of the year. It's a Mountaintop of Mush! On Feb. 14th -- we magically replace the gloves and ball bat with hearts and flowers.

Please don't misinterpret me -- we all need some special moments of renewed love. It's not all bad to have a day set aside for candy and kisses, flowers and flirtations. Mountaintop moments of love are good for the soul and the society. But let's not kid ourselves -- none of us lives forever on the mountaintop of love.

Nineteen years ago this summer - my home parish pastor was officiating for a certain couple from Oshkosh and St. Paul. I remember him graphically reminding Susan and me that the mountaintop moments of our wedding day would be short-lived. Tomorrow it's off with the tux and trousseau -- and down to the valley of marriage. It's the valleys of life that are the true testing grounds of love and marriage.

I couldn't help remembering those sobering words as I was reading "Cupid's Corner" in yesterday's DETROIT NEWS. Robert writes to Donna: "You're the best thing that's ever come my way. I love you more than ever. I hope the next ten months will be as good as the last ten." Here's a guy who thinks that "10 months" tells the whole story! Tony says to Anna: "You've made me the happiest guy in the world since our rafting trip. I have always dreamed of rafting with someone like you ... and now I want nothing more than to be rafting down the river of life with you." There's a guy who thinks that true love is "rafting down the river." Or this one from Valerie to Andrew: "First of all I love chocolate; second of all, I love my stuffed animals; and thirdly, the main thing I love is loving you!" I sincerely hope that Andrew sees the pecking order of that love ... first chocolates, then stuffed animals, and finally him!

On the front cover of PEOPLE magazine this week -- all

of us have been seeing the L'Esperances of Detroit while checking out at the grocery store. Michelle and Raymond have just gone through the "mountaintop" of having America's first in vitro quintuplets. I can only believe their wonderful "staged smiles" for PEOPLE magazine will soon change when they finally hit the valleys of changing five diapers at the same time ... while we have three more under five at home.

Ah yes, the joys of "being in love." We all want to be somebody's love, don't we? We all want somebody to say to us loud and clear, "BE MINE!" Possibly some of you have read about Elliot Essman, the 37-yr-old, twice-divorced New York word processing expert. From his word-processing business, Elliot soon realized that he had a knack for "romantic writing." Having an entrepreneurial spirit, he began to market his computerized love letters. In a very short time, Essman has a 365-member clientele paying \$35/year to receive a love-letter-a-month. He personalizes each computerized love letter with the client's name - and then sends out all 365 monthly love letters with the same oozing sentiments. Needless to say -- there's a lot of people in this world who just want to hear someone say, "BE MINE!" Not a bad way to make over \$12,000 a year -- and his business is growing monthly! (Sounds like a lucrative venture for frustrated pastors - beats selling insurance.)

Well - God was no dummy about humanity's need for mountaintop experiences of love. He gathered Peter, James, and John along with Jesus and took them to the Mount of Transfiguration. There Elijah (the great prophet) and Moses (the great deliverer) appeared with Jesus in a moment of transfiguration. It was a mountaintop high -- never before had Peter, James or John seen or heard so clearly God's message to them through Jesus: "BE MINE!" "BE MINE BY LISTENING TO HIM! GLORIFY GOD BY LOVING LIKE CHRIST!"

But almost as fast as the mountaintop high occurred, it was over! Life and love are not lived out on the mountaintops. Soon Jesus was coming down with the three disciples telling them: "BE MINE ... BY LOVING IN THE VALLEYS OF LIFE. GLORIFY ME WHERE IT REALLY COUNTS ... BY SERVING AND SACRIFICING IN THE VALLEYS OF LIFE!!"

Let's face it -- isn't that where love really counts -- when we feel accepted and forgiven in the valleys of our lives. Isn't that always the truest expression of love. Isn't that where love really matters ... when we offer food and friendship to the hungry and desolate in the valleys of life. Isn't that the greatness of God's love for us -- that he not only loves and forgives us on the mountaintops -- but he is the same loving and forgiving father in the valleys of life. That's the true glory of God -- that he is not a two-faced God ... who only loves us when we look good on the mountaintops of life.

He's not like us! So often our love for each other can only be trusted on the mountaintops. When we get down in the valleys we so often become rejecting and discriminating and accusing and less than loving! But not so with God -- his love can be totally trusted in the valleys and ditches just as it is trusted in the sanctuaries and mountaintops.

Yesterday, I did the funeral for a 49-yr old son of our congregation, Robert L. Berger Jr. Bob was a very loving son -- and I was told by many that he was the epitome of a good neighbor and trusted friend in Chicago where he worked for the past 20 years. Hundreds of people grieved his death at his viewing in Chicago. There was also a large gathering of friends at yesterday's funeral. But unknown to him -- there was one flaw in his love. He had allowed one of his trusted friends to enter his home last week. That same trusted friend unloaded a 9mm handgun at him the same night. One shot from a 9mm would have done the job -- but this friend fired four more shots just to make sure the job was done!

Robert L. Berger was thrust into the valley of death by a friend's handgun. Isn't it strange how those we sometimes trust ... those we think are our friends ... actually end up "doing us in." How contrary that trust is from our trust in God. Even when we have forgotten or not kept a close sanctuary relationship to God ... he can still be trusted. Because God is a loving and forgiving father. God would never say to one of his beloved children, "Get Lost" ... even when that child may have been distant in God's sanctuary!! Instead, God says: "BE MINE!" Especially when God's children have been thrown into the valleys of life and death -- God says - "BE MINE!" That's the limitless love of our God -- there is no greater love in the world.

And yet there is another tragedy here! Too often persons only make a visible witness to the love of God when it's too late -- at their death ... when they can no longer experience it! How tragic that so many choose to witness God's love "only at the font and the grave!" Just imagine how much love those folks are missing! Just think of the limits that they have put upon the glory and love of God.

How different it is for a family like the Scott and JoAnn Nuzum. Here's a couple who experienced early in their marriage a valley of life -- they were denied more than one biological child. But while in that valley - they heard God's message: YOU CAN ADOPT OTHER CHILDREN JUST AS I HAVE ADOPTED YOU!! Instead of giving up in the valley of life -- they started loving others just as they had been loved on the mountaintop of their first delivery! Now, through Aid to Adoption of Special Kids, the Nuzums have brought God's love to 10 more children. That's taking God's love with you into the valleys of life ... and making Valentine's Day more than a one day event.

Today, God reminds you and me that he has adopted us

on the Mountaintop of Holy Baptism. But we cannot live on that mountaintop forever -- we must bring the spirit of Holy Baptism into the valleys of our daily lives. Just like Christ himself - we must take the glory of God from Mount Transfiguration down into the valley of Golgatha ... so that God's glory can become a living sacrifice for others!

Today, God gives thanks for each of you -- FOR BEING HIS VALENTINES IN THE VALLEYS - for continuing to bring HIS baptismal love and forgiveness into the many valleys of life. Above all, for remembering that God has adopted you once and for all ... THAT YOU ARE ALWAYS HIS SPECIAL ADOPTED CHILD ... and that you are to OFFER HIS ADOPTED LOVE not only on Valentine's Day ... but from now until the day when he redeems you from the FINAL valley of life ... the valley of death!

VALENTINE'S DAY, 1988!! This is just one of 365 days that God says the same thing to his special loves: BE MINE! BE MINE FOREVER! Because this day ... like everyday, I have promised to love and forgive you wherever you may be -- whether the mountaintop of birth, the high of wedding bells, or the low that comes with the final rhapsody of life!

AMEN.

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY (LAST OF EPIPHANY)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
Sunday, February 25, 1990
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FROM THE MOUNTAINS, TO THE VALLEYS . . ."

And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one of this vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead." Matthew 17:9

"Welcome to San Diego! Now go home!" Have any of you been to San Diego lately and seen this message? I'm told that such messages have become popular bumper stickers in San Diego: "Enjoy San Diego! Then go home!"

As the Martyns learned a few years ago while visiting San Diego - this southern California town is beautiful, bountiful, benevolent, and booming with growth and vitality! It is now the 7th largest city in the U.S. But San Diego residents are deeply concerned. They don't want to become another L.A. They feel they've seen enough growth, enough new San Diegoans. So they're giving would-be residents and visitors a not-so-subtle hint: "Welcome to San Diego! Now go home!"

There's a significant correlation between this message and today's gospel story of the Transfiguration: "Enjoy the mountaintop! But don't forget to go back home . . . back to the valley of the living!" There are two dimensions to the Christian lifestyle: the mountain of exultation . . . and the valley of service. The MOUNTAINS - where we encounter God -- where we feel our souls refreshed -- where we find motivation and meaning for the living of each day. But then also the VALLEYS - where we maintain responsibilities -- where we reach out to the hurting -- where we seek to be the body of Christ at work, at service, at being merciful and compassionate. TWO DIMENSIONS TO EVERY CHRISTIAN LIFE! AND BEING FAITHFUL MEANS LIVING AND EXPERIENCING BOTH OF THEM!

TODAY - this Transfiguration text categorically says: PITY THE PERSON WHO NEVER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAINTOP WITH GOD! There is a story about a baby who loved to clap her hands. She clapped for everything -- whether her lunch, her toys, her playtime with parents, her sitting at the beach, her frolicking with her brothers and sisters. And her parents said about this: "We only worry that someday she'll stop clapping!"

And don't we all know how true that is! For too many of us have stopped clapping! We just don't show any real exultation and enthusiasm for living! We live totally consumed by what seems to be "the valley of the shadow of evil and death." We've lost the desire to clap our hands!

One author has said in his commentary on this text: "The ability to dazzle is surely one of the most magnificent characteristics of our God; and yet we never see "dazzle" on any list of God's characteristics.

Just look at creation itself -- dazzling in both its beauty and sometimes its savagery! And just think of the DAZZLING stories of God's dealing with his people: the flood, the exodus from Egypt, the kingship of David and Solomon, the courage and craziness of the prophets, and then the Nativity, the miracles, the parables, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus. Constant dazzling events from Genesis through Revelation.

The never-ending story of the faithful: God dazzles, and we respond! Jesus himself said: Happy is the man who is not scandalized by me." The word which we read as "scandalized" here means "totally shocked" or "totally repelled." We could reword that passage to say, "Happy is the person who is dazzled by me." Being dazzled is imperative for faith in Jesus Christ. Without dazzling encounters with God - we cannot come to a fulness of faith!

YES, PITY THE PERSON WHO NEVER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAINTOP WITH GOD! Bill Tammeau, writing in the Kansas City Star says: "There is that special moment as the ocean waves foam in ... that instant when the wave has spent itself into the sand ... just standing there suspended ... when it has not yet been pulled back out to the sea. For less than a second the waters stop churning ... and through their clearness, we see the ground beneath ... we see the rocks, the shells, the sand. What a magnificent experience it is to watch the WAVES of the WATERS of the WORLD! And that's just one bedazzled expression of God's creation.

And then as Tammeau did -- we try to translate that ecstatic moment into meaning for life -- into meaning for faith. What those waves of creation are telling us, dear friends, is that we must catch each dazzling moment before its gone! When God rolls in on you and me, when logic and reasoning are defied ... catch that dazzling moment because it comes and goes in an instant. Those are the mountaintop moments that mold our relationship to God.

Think of your dazzling, delightful but swiftly passing moments of life: the births, the baptisms, the friendships, the confirmations, the graduations, the birthdays, the weddings, the promotions, the holidays, the community connections. All these often take months and sometimes years of planning and processing. But they come and go so swiftly, and we are bedazzled for only a moment, and then let back down into the ordinary, the routine of life.

I have sometimes been asked to prohibit picture-taking and videoing of baptisms and weddings -- because they are distracting to others. How tragic that we do not see those moments as the bedazzling, exulting grace from God. Let us never complain about someone else's need to capture that moment on the mountaintop! For God wants us never to stop reliving those dazzling moments when he rushes in on us.

YES, PITY THE PERSON WHO NEVER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAINTOP WITH GOD! We adults too often forget the exhilaration of being a child. In his book, SERMONS IN STONE, Mel Ellis

tells of a class of geography students. They had taken a tour of the earth by book. At the end of the semester, the teacher asked them to pick the top SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD. The top picks were the following: Egypt's Great Pyramid, the Taj Mahal, the Grand Canyon, the Panama Canal, the Empire State Building, St. Peter's Basilica, and China's Great Wall.

While tallying the votes, the teacher noticed that one little girl had not turned in a paper. She approached the girl asking her if she was having problems. The little girl responded: "Yes, I'm having a hard time deciding ... there are so many!" "Well, tell us what you have," said the teacher, "we'll try to help you." Reluctantly, the girl stood up and read her paper: "I think the Seven Wonders of the World are to touch ... to taste ... to see ... and to hear ... and then to run ... to laugh ... and to love."

Each and every day, God blesses us with these Seven Wonders of the World ... THE ABILITY TO TOUCH, TO TASTE, TO SEE, TO HEAR, AND THEN TO RUN, TO LAUGH, AND TO LOVE. Pity the person who has never ascended the mountaintop with God to learn these SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD.

But pity EVEN MORE the person who only yearns for the mountain of exultation, BUT REFUSES THE VALLEY OF SERVICE. How tragic today that so many "Christians" only ascend the mountain with Jesus for Christmas & Easter, for weddings & baptisms, for confirmations or Mother's Day -- but never descend with Jesus into the valleys of service to others. This reminds me of the classic story of Dr. Albert Einstein. Einstein received many requests for help, but the most unusual came from a distraught mother. She wrote: "Dear Dr. Einstein: My son thinks he's Jesus. I write to ask you to talk with him. For he will not come down from his mountaintop for anyone - and he's been there for three weeks already! Will you help me?"

Einstein talked with this boy, and he came down from his "high" with Jesus. Later Einstein said, "I didn't argue with the boy's delusions. Instead, I simply reminded him that Jesus came down from the mountain to become a fisher among men."

YES, PITY THE PERSON WHO NEVER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAIN WITH GOD. BUT PITY EVEN MORE THOSE WHO NEVER DESCEND WITH JESUS INTO THE VALLEY OF SERVICE. And the great temptation of our day -- especially in religion - is to only want to join Jesus on the mountaintops. Too many "Christians" today feel just like that little boy: they only want a Jesus who gives glory, comfort, entertainment - a never-ending "high." Too many Christians today don't want a Christianity or a church that confronts them with the valleys of service, of suffering, and sacrificial living & giving. People today want a gospel of glory without a faith of fulfillment. People today want all divine dazzle without equal dedicated discipleship!

Without equivocation, today's text reminds us that Jesus ushered Peter, James and John down from the mountain back into the valley of daily service. The point of the text is theologically trite yet practically profound: THE ONLY KIND OF MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE WORTH HAVING IS ONE THAT ALWAYS LEADS US DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF EXULTATION INTO THE VALLEYS OF SERVICE. The proof of any authentic encounter with God is always a transfigured life ... a life that has been changed to care for others.

TV host Merv Griffin was interviewing the great Charlton Heston who played Moses in the Ten Commandments and starred in Ben Hur. Griffin asked Heston if any of the characters he had ever portrayed had changed his spiritual outlook. Heston thought for a moment, and then said: "Well, Merv, you can't walk down Mt. Sinai barefoot and remain the same person you were when you went up." The mountaintop experience with God always brings us down changed persons -- transfigured to serve amidst the trenches, the tribulations, and the tragedies of this world.

How grateful I am that we are a Christian tradition which celebrates the mountaintops of our faith -- the real dazzling events of Jesus' life and our lives as his followers. But thankfully we are a tradition that does not get stuck in an empty tomb ... or remain dazzled by a Virgin birth ... or remain rivited to the skies waiting for some Second Coming. We have come down to the valley of service with our Lord. Each Transfiguration Sunday is the prelude to our Lenten journey to Jerusalem ... where God prepares the way for us to better understand the meaning of "suffering and sacrificing for his sake."

I hope you have received a little "high" from your ascent to the Mountaintop with Jesus today. Every worship service should momentarily remove us from the valley of death and desecration in this world. Through music and prayers, thru fellowship & sacrament, thru hearing the Word, each week we ascend above the noise and confusion of this world. But God help us when we choose to hallow these moments as if they are "the kingdom, the power, and the glory of God." For God calls us down from the mountaintops ... he shows us the people outside the walls of this sanctuary -- and he says: "NOW GO AND WITNESS TO WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED ... that others might also have life, and have it more abundantly!" Go to your neighbor next door, to those you work with every day, to the people you pass on the street -- and give them the dazzle of my life ... let them feel the joy of my love, my touch, my taste and my feel for life. Let them know they have been given the Seven Wonders of the World, just like you! Yes, "WELCOME TO THE MOUNTAIN ... NOW GO HOME ... go live my life and my love in the valleys of life! For of such is the kingdom of Heaven!

AMEN.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 1, 1992
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN"

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. (And a man cried, "Teacher, I beg you to heal my son.") Luke 9:37f

Today, Luke's "Transfiguration" text conveys a graphic truth of life and faith: "Pity the person who never ascends the mountaintop with God!" One of my favorite stories on this day recalls the baby who loved to clap her hands. She clapped for everything - whether her lunch, her toys, her playtime with parents, her frolicking with sisters or brothers, or even her desire to take her nap. And her parents said about this: "We only worry that some day she'll stop clapping!"

And don't we all know how true this is! Far too many of us have stopped clapping. Too many people in this world no longer show any real enthusiasm or exultation for living! Too many people when asked, "How's it going?" too often respond, "Oh, I guess I'll make it!" For many, that's the mountaintop of ecstasy! Too many people today seem to be consumed by the "valley of the shadow of death and evil." Too many have lost the desire to clap their hands!

In fact, just to make certain that we're all alive and grateful to be in God's presence this morning - let's give Him the FIRST APPLAUSE of the day! Thank you! Now you can at least go home from church today and say that you were moved enough to clap your hands for God this morning!

One author's commentary on this text states: "The ability to dazzle is certainly one of the most magnificent characteristics of our God; and yet, we never see "dazzle" on any list of theological characteristics for the grace of God!

Well, thanks to your support of the staff - Jeff, Debbie and I went to the Luth. School of Theology in Chicago two weeks ago. We went there to be dazzled by some new ideas about God and our faith -- to be inspired by some of the most exciting modern theologians in the Christian Church today. The theme of this conference was: THE CONGREGATION AS A PLACE OF MORAL DISCOURSE. Speakers like Dr. Larry Rasmussen reminded us that there is a serious moral vacuum in our culture today. He said: "Never before has the church faced a greater challenge to be a moral formation builder for Christian character and conscience." Modernism - which has served as the civil religion of our culture over the past decade - always asks the question: "What's in it for me?" Rasmussen concluded, our society has finally realized

that "what's in it for me" cannot be THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE for future generations. For "what's in it for me" has been the cause of pollution, perversity & fragmentation in our world today. As you can see - there was a lot of DAZZLE from God's messengers at this conference. But maybe even more significant - on Monday night (when there were no speakers), Jeff, Debbie and I went to see Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls do battle with the Cleveland Cavaliers. Now, that was real razzle, dazzle! That was really ascending the mountaintop - literally, we had standing seats at top of the stadium.

Some of you may think I'm kidding, but I'm being utterly serious! One of the greatest needs we all have in our day to day existence is a VICTORIOUS VISION ... where the mundane and often depressing realities of our lives can be uplifted and renewed! Those two hours at the Chicago Collesium offered your staff an opportunity to be uplifted from the moral depravity, from the negatives and constant petty criticism, from the despair and disappointments that become so much a part of parish life. The same was true for Peter, James and John -- a few moments on the mountaintop with Jesus just to experience a vision of victory over the defeating elements of daily life.

How desperately each of us needs to live with a vision of victory for our everyday lives. I am reminded of my final experience with the Examining Committee before my ordination in 1971. Dr. Ted Matson, then the bishop of the Wis-Upper Mich. Synod, asked me: "Peter, when you will fall on hard times in your future ministry ... when life's problems overtake life's pleasures ... what will enable you to remain a courageous and committed Christian!?" Can you imagine how snowed I was by that question!?! There I was - a mere 28 years old ...never having experienced defeat other than a close call with death at 24 ... and I was supposed to sound profound about a faith that would see me through the worst of times. So, thinking I could get by with some heady theological stuff ... I offered a brief treatise on the nature of Christian commitment. It probably came off to the Committee as little more than a lot of passing gas from a senior seminarian. But even though I missed the mark, at least it was a lot of genuine and honest hot air!

A few weeks later - when I was again in the presence of Dr. Matson, who had served as a pastor and bishop for over 40 years - I asked: "Dr. Matson, I was really embarrassed by my response to your question; what were you really wanting me to say? He simply said: "I was hoping you'd say that a vision of the victorious Christ would get you through anything that life will give you!!" I have never forgotten that suggestion!

That's what Peter, James and John needed on the mountaintop: a vision of the victorious Christ! If they were to continue as disciples, then they needed the assurance that this Christ would be victorious over the

defeating realities of the world. And that's what the Transfiguration story is all about: a vision of a Christ who defeats all the powers that seek to negate us and our world! That's why you and I are here this morning ... and every Sunday morning: WE COME TO EXPERIENCE A VISION OF A VICTORIOUS CHRIST! We come to hear it, to see it, to sing about it, to pray for it, and to receive that victorious presence into our bodies through bread and wine! In a world of disease, distress and despair - we have come to be dazzled by the love of Jesus Christ! It may not seem as dazzling as the dunks of Michael Jordan ... or the moves of Willie Green or power of Michael Cofer from the Lions. But the glory of the Jordans and Cofers and Greens of this world will be very short-lived. In the very near future, when Michael Jordan is already long-forgotten - the story of Christ's transfiguration will continue to dazzle millions and millions. And those same millions will gather here and other places on Sunday mornings to experience the presence and power of this victorious Christ! So, we ascend the mountain to experience a victorious vision of Jesus Christ!

But just as we pity any Christian who has never ascended that mountaintop with God -- even more is a Christian to be pitied if he/she has not COME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN with the life of the Spirit. As I said at the outset of today's sermon - the most impt verse is omitted from our lectionary: "On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met them." Immediately as they came down from the mountain, Jesus and his disciples were confronted with the needs of the world!! It's one thing to receive a victorious Christ on the mountaintop; it's quite another to take that vision DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN and offer it to the rest of the world.

This is exactly what Jesus did after COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN - he offered the world the true glory of his life: he continued to sacrifice himself for the good of the world! He came down to face a journey to Jerusalem, to be rejected and scorned, to be lied about and hated, to be denied and betrayed, and to ultimately hang on a cross. How much more comfortable it would have been for Jesus to stay up there on the mountaintop -- away from the cruelty and immorality and deception of the world! In fact, Peter strongly urged that they do just that -- build three tabernacles up there in the clouds where they wouldn't be tainted by the stench and stupor of a foul and fickle world!

There are many Christians who have that same vision of glory for the church and its mission. They see a vision of Christ totally removed from the pains and problems of a rebellious world. I just read this week about a church that has now completed the biggest, most well-equipped "Christian Life Center" in the U.S. at a cost of \$3.7 million. It sports a swimming pool, two gymnasiums, four racquetball courts, and a weight room that would put our local YMCA to shame. The clergy and laity of this congregation had caught a mountaintop vision of a transfigured Christ -- but that's

right where they left him: stranded as a building monument on a mountaintop! They failed to envision that Christ's glory is not to be viewed as a brick and mortar monument but to be experienced in flesh and blood ministries. Pity God's people who never descend from the mountain of transfiguration.

Like Peter, James and John - it is never enough to witness the light of Jesus' countenance on the mountain and then forget to bring that light into the darkness of the world around us. Every week the life of this church should be a transfiguring vision of the victorious Christ. Likewise, every week (like this one) should be the beginning of a journey to Jerusalem -- where our vision of this victorious Christ leads us to a sacrificial and courageous lifestyle of compassion and commitment to the lost and the least and the hurting. The true test for the followers of Jesus Christ is not on the mountaintop but in the valley of the shadow of death. For it was in that valley ... in the midst of defeat and despair ... that Jesus Christ still offered the ultimate words of victory: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO!" Is it any wonder that a voice came from that cloud saying: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; Listen to Him."

About six years ago, that same voice of God spoke through an 80-yr old member here at Hope. In many ways, this woman had ascended to the top of the mountain many times - she had been blessed with 79 years of life; she had a deeply devoted and caring family; and even though she was poor in material wealth, she was one of the richest ladies I had ever seen in compassion and love for others. She knew the victorious life -- God had seen her through good times and bad; he had comforted her in marriage, in the trials and tribulations of her family, and through the loss of her husband. And now, as she was about to turn 80, she was challenged again with malignant cancer! As the bishop once asked me: HOW WAS SHE GOING TO SEE HER WAY THROUGH THIS HARD TIME, WHEN LIFE'S PLEASURES HAD TURNED INTO LIFE'S PROBLEMS?

The time came for her to celebrate her 80th birthday. In light of her health condition, the family wanted to give her a special gift, like a cruise. But she refused. She reminded them that God had been good to her and she didn't want an expensive, exhoritant gift. Finally she said: "Just come over and have birthday cake; and each of you bring a dollar ... that's all I want!" So on her 80th birthday, they all contributed a dollar -- children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, shirt-tail, even friends. Each person gave just one dollar. They put their dollars on a large plant, and presented her with a money-tree on her 80th birthday (the first money tree of her life). There were a 168 one dollar bills on that money tree. What a glorious spectacle of transforming love was that tree in the living room; what a dazzling mountaintop of victory was that day in her 80 years of life!

It would only seem appropriate, that since she was not rolling in dough, that she should use her money-tree to get something very special for herself. Well, not so for this woman who was no longer living by the motto: "What's in it for me," but rather, "what can I do for others to show the transfiguring love of Christ!"

The next Thursday, she came into my office with a #10 white envelope stuffed with 168 dollar bills. She said: "Pastor, I want my money-tree to be used to bring the same victorious love of Christ which I have experienced through my family to some other family desperately in need of a money-tree!" That's COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN and offering the victorious love of Christ to others! For isn't that exactly THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE OF CHRIST. He didn't say: "If anyone would come after me, let her be crowned with splendor and glory on a mountaintop." Rather he said, "If anyone would come after me, let her take up her cross and follow me." I'm looking forward to your COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN with me this Lent and beyond! AMEN.

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY (Last of Epiphany)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
February 13, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"A VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP"

And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white ... and Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Mark 9:3,5

Exactly eleven years ago -- February 13, 1983 -- we celebrated Transfiguration Sunday and I entitled my sermon: "A View from the Mountaintop." But the inspiration for that Sunday had been a five-day conference in Chicago on "Visions of the New Church." Fifteen papers had been presented at that conference; 350 participants responded to those papers in small groups at the Luth School of Theology. At the very same time, several of us also attended concurrent meetings of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church which was meeting at the Hyde Park Hilton. None of us were literally on a mountaintop, but the VIEW OF THE NEW LUTHERAN CHURCH at that time was truly a Mountaintop experience. The glory of God was shining through the imperfections of the "way things stood as the ALC, LCA and AELC." Here were some of the most gifted and committed visionaries of the church -- coming together to make the New Lutheran Church A NEAR PERFECT EXPRESSION OF THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE SERVANTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST!

Well, it's now eleven years later. That visionary church has come to be called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. And I would be less than honest if I did not say that it has lost some of the "mountaintop" grandeur conceived for it at that conference. Why? Because it had to come down from the mountaintop; it had to come face to face with a sinful world; it had to confront the racism and sexism and brutality of real people in the urban and suburban valleys of this country. And when confronting this real world -- it began to lose some of its idealism and graciousness. From the mountaintop of Chicago in 1983 -- this church was going to be one of the greatest Lutheran expressions of unity, wholeness, mission-mindedness, and servanthood. But from the valleys of some 11,000 congregations -- this vision of unity and servanthood became tainted by self-interests and clergy misconduct and astronomical health care costs and conflicts of theology & piety, and all the other harrassing realities of real life. The ELCA has learned that it's never possible to live forever on the mountaintop with Jesus.

But that's still the vision of this Transfiguration Sunday -- God takes us up the hill to get a VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP! And just like Peter, James & John -- every Christian regularly needs those mountaintop moments. Every Christian needs to "get out of the rut" of everyday routines & demands AND GET UP ON HIGHER GROUND TO SEE A NEW PERSPECTIVE FOR HIS/HER LIFE. Ask any family who has been caring for a sick family member for

days or years -- and you will hear a family that desperately recognizes the need for TRANSFIGURATION MOMENTS. Even if it's just a Hospice Volunteer or Church Caller who comes into the house for an hour or two -- THAT CAN BE A MOUNTAINTOP MOMENT ... a time to get a renewed perspective on things.

Some of you may not like the analogy - but I think the Winter Olympic Games can have that effect upon our whole world -- these next two weeks can offer us moments of inspiration ... can raise us out of our doldrums as we see athletes who have made great sacrifices in order to compete for the good/gold of their countries. And what a tragedy that America's involvement must be tainted by the Tonya Harding affair. ONE LITTLE BUTHEAD POISONS THE GAMES FOR AMERICA! And this morning we learn that her law suit has been dropped because the ASOC has cut a deal; why can't America just say: "you've dishonored your profession and your country -- stay home and sulk in your own sinful stupidity ... you no longer deserve the opportunity to compete or to win!" Thankfully - most of us will get beyond this "Tonya thing" and be given a two-week transfiguring view of life" that transforms the guns & gutters & homelessness & hunger that daily surrounds us here in the valleys of America.

But as Pastor Bob once said on this Sunday: "BEWARE OF HIGHS!" Don't be too bedazzled by ecstasy; it never lasts! I have that experience every summer after living on a "cliff in Door County" for a couple of weeks. I never want to leave that "Door County High!" The 500 mile drive from that cliff to the flatlands of Northwest Ohio is one of the most depressing drives for me every summer. There was another Peter in today's gospel who had the same problem as this Peter. HE WANTED TO STAY STUCK IN THE GLORY OF THE MOUNTAIN VIEW ... he wanted to remain removed from the messiness of ministry where life is lived on the highways and biways of our cities. He was emphasizing what too many Christian churches wrongly emphasize: THAT JESUS' MISSION IS ONLY ONE OF GLORY ... ALL HIGHS, ALL GOOD TIMES, NEVER ANY PROBLEMS. It's the same temptation that Jesus faced at the beginning of his ministry: that religiosity means that we can throw ourselves down from the pinnacle on high and not be hurt. But transfiguration Sunday announces that there is more to this gospel than MOUNTAINTOP HIGHS!

Regretably, some Christians never get this message because they only gather with God on Christmas and Easter -- two of the greatest highs of the Christian year. So these Christians develop a kingdom of glory theology - thinking that Jesus only wants us to sit atop of the world counting our millions, but not really concerned about the pains and paralyses of those suffering in the valleys. Transfiguration Sunday cautions us against a religious life that proclaims only the glories of faith without the suffering of faithful servanthood.

Without a doubt -- we all need a faith that calls us up to the top of the mountain -- THAT GIVES US A VIEW THAT OVERCOMES THE HURTS AND THE HASSLES OF LIFE. But once renewed on the

mountaintop -- once we are again convinced like Peter, James & John that Jesus truly is the Christ ... then we are called to come down and offer to others what we have received.

Let me illustrate this by contrasting the seasons of Lent with tomorrow's holy of holy days: St Valentine's. How many of you think that Lent is one of the greatest seasons of the church year?? (Hands please!) Now, how many of you are looking forward to a special celebration of Valentine's Day tomorrow?? (Hands please!)

Now let's really reflect on these two seasons of celebration. Valentine's Day is our annual, heart-filled celebration of romantic love. But let's be honest -- how long do these valentine's day sentiments really last?? For many - the sentiments "of love" don't even last as long as the candlelight dinner.

But now let's look at Lent. Lent is Jesus' Valentine's Day card addressed to each of us personally. Lent is God's way of showing us a deep and abiding kind of love. At the cross - we see a love that knows no limitations. Here's a love that reaches out to everyone - not only to white, anglo-saxon Protestants. Here's a love that spills out life for others -- a love that is self-giving, rather than self-serving. Here's a love that isn't worried about the costs involved ... it's totally given. Here's a love that never gives up -- never seeks a separation or divorce. Here's a love that is willing to face rejection and ridicule. Here's a love that is not reluctant to take the path of sacrifice whenever necessary. Here's a love that doesn't talk about forgiveness, but demonstrates it on a cross. Here's a love that is so passionate that it fully carries out the will of God.

Now tell me: which season is a greater celebration of love -- Valentine's Day or Lent?? Transfiguration Sunday precedes the season of Lent to remind us that following our views from the mountaintop -- we are called to a Lenten Kind of Love: A LOVE WHICH IS WILLING TO COME DOWN INTO THE REAL WORLD AND OFFER ITSELF SACRIFICIALLY!

In all my years at Hope, that kind of love was best illustrated for me by an 80-yr old member who celebrated her 80th birthday just eight years ago. This mom and grandma had in some ways "reached the top" -- not in material success, but in terms of satisfaction and joy with her whole family. God has blessed her with 79 years of family and vocational success in Toledo. God had seen her through many good years and many bad years; he had comforted her in marriage and for many years after her husband had died. And now she was fighting a progressive malignancy that she knew would take her life, but God was still comforting her through her family.

So, she gathered with her family to celebrate her 80th birthday -- which she knew would probably be her last birthday with the family. Before the birthday party, she had called

all the kids and told them she wanted no birthday gifts -- just come and have a piece of her 80th birthday cake. She said "God has given me enough material things, but if you insist on bringing me a gift -- then just bring a dollar." So the family listened to their mother and grandmother. And on her 80th birthday in January, 1986 -- all the kids did just as she had asked: they all just brought a dollar: children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, shirt-tail relatives -- the whole bunch just brought a buck. And they all put their dollars on a large, planter-tree ... and presented this mother/grandmother with the first money-tree that she had ever received in her life. 168 one-dollar bills hung on that money tree. It represented every single relative that she had on earth. What a transfiguring spectacle that money-tree was -- she just sat there glowing in front of it. IT WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST VIEWS FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP THAT SHE HAD EVER HAD!!

Now - for a mother and grandmother who had never, ever received a money-tree before - you would certainly think she would have kept this just as a great token of remembrance ... or maybe gone out to the Lion's Store or Jacobsons and bought her the nicest dress she had ever had.

But not for this soldier of the cross. She had been "transfigured by the love of Christ" in that moment on her 80th birthday. And once a true Christian is "transfigured by the love of Christ" -- there is only one possible response: SHE WANTED TO TRANSFIGURE SOMEONE ELSE. So just two weeks after her birthday -- she called and came to my office. And she took all 168 of those single dollar bills out of an envelope -- and she offered her "money-tree" to the Lord with the hope that it would be used to help "give someone else a VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP." She just wanted to make one of her last gifts of life a VERY SPECIAL OFFERING OF PRAISE AND THANKS TO GOD.

Next Wednesday, we begin the Lenten pilgrimage of Love. It's not the all-appealing, all-American story of Valentine's Day. Far more people will be faithful to Valentine's Day than to Ash Wednesday! But the love story of Lent is God's transfiguration story of life -- the story of God changing human suffering into everlasting love. It is the story that we celebrate and repeat every time we gather at this altar. It is a story that was fully celebrated by an 80-yr old woman in this church eight years ago and has been celebrated by many other men and women since! Could there possibly be a BETTER VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP??

AMEN.

*Transfiguration Sunday
Glenwood Lutheran & Sunset House
February 22, 1998
Peter R. Martyn, Presiding Pastor & Chaplain*

“THE GLORY YET TO COME!”

[Then Moses & Elijah] appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ... Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!” Luke 9:21;35

Play the refrain from “Glory Days” by Bruce Springstein

For many of you -- that recording of “Glory Days” written by Bruce Springstein in the 70’s may be “too hard rock.” It tells the story of a group of his friends who could not stop reminiscing about the “glory days” of high school when they were great athletes, lovers and beauties. In terms of today’s text -- they had put a veil over their heads and were living in the “glory days” of the past!

And which of us in this room have never done just exactly that?!? Most of us love to live in the “glory days” of the past. I remember my first year of teaching high school in Monroe, Wisconsin. That area was called Little Switzerland -- it was some of the most hilly terrain in Wisconsin. I was young and single ... very inexperienced ... and I wasn’t a “Switzer” as they were all called in that area. Yet here I was at 24 -- totally in charge of a new mandatory speech curriculum at Monroe High School. Every day was an exhausting challenge -- but every day was also a great thrill of accomplishment and love of those kids. Some of them wrote to me for several years after I left Monroe. And I’ll never forget roaming the hills of Little Switzerland in my 1966 Mustang convertible every weekend. Wow -- were those the “glory days! I’ll bet if I gave every one a chance here this morning -- you could all “one up me” on one of your “glory day” stories of the past.

In fact -- if we’re really honest -- that’s often what every church does: it loves to tell the “glory days” stories of the past. Too often - just like my days in Monroe -- we think the “glory days” only happened back then when we were young and full of it!! Certainly -- in the last 18 months as I visited many shut-ins and some of you -- I heard many stories of the “glory days” of Glenwood’s past. And I thank God for all those wonderful stories. Right now in Nagano, Japan -- some of our best athletes are celebrating a “glory day” like they will never know again in their entire lifetime. Obviously, Tara Lipinsky and Michelle Kwan will have other chances; but that may never happen again for Picabo Street or Todd Eldridge. There’s nothing in sports like the glory of gold, silver and bronze. Even watching it gives each of us a rush of glory!

Well - if you’re still with me - then you have some idea of this day of Christ’s Transfiguration on the mountaintop. Never before had Peter, James and John experienced a “glory day” like this one with Jesus. They had no idea when they went up that mountain that they would actually see the glory of their Lord.

And more than that - they even encountered a "near resurrected" presence of Eilijah and Moses. Is it any wonder that Peter wanted to capture this moment forever -- to build three dwelling places where Jesus and the prophets would remain "enshrined in glory" permanently.

Well, Bruce Springstein was way ahead of Peter, James and John. His lyrics make crystal clear God's word about our "glory days" on earth:

*"Glory days, well they'll pass you by ...
Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eyes ...
Glory days, glory days!"*

"Glory days" come ... they move us ... they have incredible power for the moment ... and then they pass ... leaving behind only a faint whiff of the joy we felt while we experienced them. Transfiguration Sunday reminds us that if we're stuck in the "glory days" of the past ... if we've built dwellings to keep all God's glory imprisoned in yesterday's highs ... if we've put a veil over God's power and made it a past glory -- then we're probably in deep trouble. In fact - - we may be suffering serious depression.

And yet my friends -- isn't that too often exactly what the church of Jesus does to God's power: claims it as only a reality in the "glory days" gone by. Is it any wonder that some of the young today feel that "God is deadf!?" All his power has been too often tied to the events of the past! Certainly his power is related to Bible stories of the past -- but those stories must be meaningfully applied to the present and the future. And that's the reason ... and the only reason that we come to church: **TO HEAR HOW GOD'S GLORY IS APPLIED TO THE HERE AND NOW!!**

Transfiguration Sunday attempts to do just that: to reveal that God's glory is "Yet To Come!" We're told that "Moses and Elijah were speaking of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem." Could the Bible make it any clearer?!? The real glory did not occur on the mountaintop -- the real glory was "yet to come" in Jerusalem!! The real glory was not a dazzling white "glory day" on a mountain of meditation -- the real "glory day" was yet to come on a hill far away at Golgatha. The real "glory day" in the Christian Church is not that moment that gives us a "glorified high" on Sunday. Rather, the real high occurs when we are willing to go down the mountain with Jesus to offer his transfigured grace to those in lower places.

As one commentator says - Transfiguration Sunday does not tell us to look for "the light at the end of the tunnel!" Rather, it tells us "to be God's temple of light for the tunnels of darkness" in the world. The Church is NOT to be that place which waits for people to blunder their way to us. We are to be the glory of the Lord that brings his light of life to those yet living in tunnels of darkness out there in the world.

Another theologian remarks: *"Have you ever noticed the way our stained glass windows are directed? Too often they only tell our story of Christ's glory to those already safely inside the illuminated interiors of our church buildings. To*

those outside in the tunnels of darkness our beautiful windows are nothing but hazy, multi-colored blurs ... they offer no hope!" Nothing could be more contrary to the dazzling glory of God. The Bible says with graphic clarity: "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son." God's glory, his goodness, his graciousness, his mercy is to shine on those outside who need help -- not merely on those already "saved on the inside."

Transfiguration Sunday reminds us that a church which only wants a mountaintop of transfiguring glory without the hilltop of a suffering cross is not the church of Jesus Christ. The true glory of Jesus Christ did not come on a mountain of transfiguration but rather on a hilltop of Golgatha. True glory for Jesus finally came when He surrendered to His Father's will to suffer and die that he might show the true Glory of God.

It's time to turn out stain-glass windows outward -- to tell the story of Jesus' love to those still trapped in the tunnels of darkness. **That's why we come to church -- not to get the glory for ourselves ... but to shed the light of God's glory on those still stuck in the tunnels of darkness.** God's glory is yet to come at Glenwood -- and every other place that is true to the gospel. The "Glory Days" of God are still ahead of us. Regardless of the pastor who stands in this pulpit -- the "glory days" for Jesus Christ are not something of the past. God is still waiting for us to be his transforming light for anyone living in darkness. So -- let's take off the veil of yesterday's glory ... let's not leave here today without singing of GOD'S GLORY YET TO COME:

*"This Little Light of Mine; I'm Gonna let it shine!
This little Light of mine; I'm gonna let it shine!
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine ...
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!*

AMEN.