

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Transfiguration
Saturday, February 18, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, February 19, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“We Are Witnesses”

2 Peter 1:16-21

Today as we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord, the Epiphany Season draws to a close. Throughout this season, in our Gospel lessons, it was revealed to us that Jesus Christ, the child born of the virgin Mary is True God begotten of the Father from eternity. We witnessed as He is declared to be the Son of God by the Father Himself when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The voice thundered from heaven, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

We witnessed John the Baptist declare Jesus to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We witnessed Jesus calling His disciples to faith. We heard the Good News of the kingdom of God in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. 2000 years after Christ walked on this earth preaching and teaching, through the gift of the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, we too have become witnesses of this great Good News of eternal life that is only found in the Son of God.

How is it that, we being 2000 years removed from these events; how is it that we are witnesses of these things to the world? It is only through the testimony of faithful witnesses handed down to us in Holy Scripture that we see the Father declare Jesus to be the Son of God there on the banks of the Jordan River or it is only through the testimony of witnesses that we hear John the Baptist declare Jesus to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world” [Jn. 1:29]. And today, it is only through the testimony of faithful witnesses handed down to us in Holy Scripture that we see the power of God manifested, that is, God’s power was unmistakably revealed for the world to see, as Christ was transfigured on the mountain.

Our annual Confirmation retreat at Camp CILCA is this weekend. We are leaving at 1:00 (on Sunday). This reality that we can only know anything through the testimony of faithful witnesses is a major theme of our retreat.

During St. Peter’s ministry, those who despised Christ and His church were accusing Peter and the other apostles of making up stories about Jesus. Like many people today, and throughout history, enemies of the church have sought to dismiss the Living God and what He has done as a myth or fairy tale. Thankfully, Jesus left the evidence of an empty tomb and witnesses of the empty tomb, so that no one could question that a few days after Jesus died, there was an empty tomb. The only question is, “How did it get empty?”

As Peter writes his letter in 68 AD, the same year he would be crucified under the persecution of Emperor Nero, there were many people who struggled to believe the stories of miracles and Jesus rising from the dead. And there were plenty more who would do anything to blot the memory of Jesus of Nazareth from the face of the earth.

Christians in Peter’s day had no advantage over the Christians today who are confronted by those who say that there was no Son of God born in Bethlehem, that there were no miracles, that there was no resurrection, and that there certainly was no conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Christians in the days of the apostles are just like us today – in faith, they could look to Holy Scripture as a sure witness of the events that took place, or they could listen to the words of Peter and hear the testimony that “I saw it with my own eyes.”

Peter says: “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.” And Peter goes to his own cross and grave refusing to deny Jesus ever again and continues to bear witness in Jesus of Nazareth being the crucified and risen Son of God.

And now that he is allowed to tell others what he and James and John witnessed on the mountain, he is going to tell everyone. What a sight that must have been. There is a reason that Peter said, “Lord, it is good that we are here.” Even though the glory of God was too much to look at, Peter did not want to leave the Mount of Transfiguration. He wanted to remain in the presence of the glory of God. Who can blame him? Last Sunday in Bible class, we pondered what the euphoria of the glory of heaven and eternity will be like.

Peter saw it with his own eyes, and in his second epistle, he wants everyone to be absolutely sure that God’s Word is no fairy tale. He said: “We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven. [We] were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word”, and you will do well to pay attention to it.

As stated before, the people in the days of the apostles were very similar to people today. Many people in Peter’s day viewed the Old Testament, the writings of Moses and the prophets, in the same way that many people today view the writings of the New Testament. They say, “That stuff was written a couple thousand years ago. It’s a nice story, but what does it have to do with my life?”

When Christ came into the world preaching and teaching, the words of the prophets were made more certain, as Peter says. For Peter and the other disciples, it was now clear that the prophets indeed had spoken the truth. In the future, when Christ returns, it will be clear to the people of the modern world that the words of the New Testament also speak the truth.

Christ assured the disciples that what they were teaching and preaching was God's Word and not a cleverly fabricated story dreamed up by somebody. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was made certain that what he had received from Jesus Christ over the previous three years was truly from God Himself.

Many of us wish that we could have an experience like that of Peter, James, and John: to see Moses and Elijah and to hear the voice of God from heaven. However, it is obviously not necessary for faith or salvation to have a "mountain-top experience." If it were, Jesus would have invited all of the disciples and everyone in Israel to come up the mountain.

But rather, as is His usual way, Christ called the people to faith on the testimony of His Word and the word of faithful witnesses. Nine of the twelve disciples heard about the Mount of Transfiguration the same way that you and I did – they heard it through the testimony of Peter, James, and John.

The primary work of God does not involve miracles and visions. That is not how we come to know Him. The primary work of God is bringing salvation to mankind, and we come to know the crucified and risen Christ and receive that message of salvation in God's Word and His Sacraments. If you are looking for a miracle to confirm your salvation, you will find it right here in His Word, and here in His body and blood, just as a miracle took place for you at the baptismal font.

We come to know Him through the testimony of faithful witnesses as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write it down. And we come to know our Lord through the Word of God joined to water, and the Word made flesh who dwelt among us and now comes to us under the form of bread and wine. As we look to God, and join with angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven, and receive that life-giving body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is our time to cry out, "Lord, it is good that we are here!" Amen.