



St John Lutheran Church

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Luke 9:28-36

"Prepared to Die, Prepared to Live"

What we have before us this morning is St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. **"And behold, two men talked with (Jesus), who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease (or as the text literally says - His exodus) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep...After Peter spoke about wanting to stay on the Mountain, "a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'"**

Today, we find ourselves... **both in** terms of God's Word... **and in** terms of the season... **hemmed in... by the** subject of death. **In terms of** the season of the Church Year we are about to enter the season of Lent... **which begins** with Ash Wednesday. **Lent, of course,** is a rather somber season of the year... **a time** in which we reflect on our own sinfulness and the price that God paid to redeem us.. **to buy** us back from that sin... **and it** culminates with Good Friday... **the Passion** and the ultimate trial and death of our Lord Jesus.

In terms of the Bible passages before us this morning we have the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy 34... **where the** death and burial of Moses is recorded. **And then, when** we look to the Gospel reading from Luke 9... **we find** that the whole Transfiguration event is hemmed in by two instances in which Jesus spoke very candidly to His disciples about His impending death. **On one occasion** in Luke 9:22 He says, **"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed," and then again in Luke 9:44,** He says, **"let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."**

And so, with the season and with the Biblical context we can hardly escape today the subject of death. **Which brings up** a good question for us to consider today, namely, **'is the subject of death something that should ever be far from the Church's conversation?' I don't mean** that we should walk around looking like doom and gloom... **talking about** nothing but death... **having nothing** to offer but a long face and a sad look... **but shouldn't** the subject of death be something that we are well acquainted with ...**and something** that we are comfortable talking about? **St. Paul tell** us in Philippians 1 **"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."**

Somewhere in history there was a change in mindset... **it would** seem... **as to** what the Church should be all about. **That change in** mindset is often demonstrated in the activities that can be found around the church in a given week. **As a pastor** I have to confess that it is often rather frustrating to me to hear of and to witness what attracts people to a particular church these days. **The 'successful church,'** for instance... **has a** good daycare... **it offers** family planning and financial seminars... **it offers** a style of worship that allows the people to **'celebrate'** ...**rather than** to be confronted with the realities of sin and grace and what that means to us every day of our lives... **the successful** new church has the largest gymnasium or 'family life center'... **the new "successful church"** teaches, people ...**people are** told how to overcome what overcomes them **why, it** even offers Christian aerobics to help people to put on a better physique.

So...Somewhere in history there was a change in mindset... **it would** seem... **as to** what the Church should be all about. **These things that** I have just mentioned to you... **for instance... while not** necessarily bad in and of themselves...**they do** keep us busy with life... **when the** one primary subject or primary purpose of the Church **is to prepare its people for death. Yes, even in** this 21st century... **when all** the world is clamoring for the church to be more relevant... **more focused** on the everyday issues of life... **the faithful** pastor and parishioner will be about the business of preparing people for death... **for death** is inevitable for us...**and the** reality is that death it is our great collective fear! **Death is our biggest problem...it is our great enemy...the enemy that we are helpless against. This is why** few people want to talk about death...**it is** our great enemy that stalks us every single day of our lives!

But it is death that the Church prepares us for... **and defends** us against...**it has** always been so down through history. **The word "cemetery"** comes from the Greek and it came with the Early Christian Church. **In it's original** form "cemetery" means "**sleeping place**" ...or... "**waiting place.**" **So while** the rest of the world buries it's dead in a graveyard or a tomb...**the Christian** Church buries her dead in a "**waiting place.**" **It should be** noted that in most all "Church cemeteries," even still in America...**the dead** are buried with the person facing East...**the place** where the sun rises...**the symbol** of the Resurrection! **It is for** that reason that our own altar here at St. John (and many other Christian altars) are also facing East...**in the** earnest expectation of the return of the Son of God!

When you are baptized...**you come** to this font...**and most** Christian fonts ...and **you** see an 8 sided structure...**pointing to** the "**8th Day**" Scriptural theology of being reborn...**of being** a new and perfect creation in Christ! **Here you are** reborn in the womb of the Church to live forever! **You sit in** the "nave"...**a word** from the Latin...**meaning "navy."** **Look up and** around you and imagine this structure turned upside down...**and you** will see the uncanny resemblance to an ancient ship...**here in** this place... **you sit** in God's Ark of salvation which will carry through this world of death! **I could go** on and on...**but the** point is that the Church has always been concerned with the subject of death and preparing the Lord's people to deal with it according to the faith taught by God Himself!

So, once again the season of the Church Year and the passage in Luke's Gospel before us this morning keep us mindful of the subject of death. **When Jesus appeared** on the Mount of Transfiguration Scripture says that Moses and Elijah appeared there with Him. **That must have** been a fascinating thing to see. **In fact this** whole passage from Luke 9 is filled with fascinating events. **But, one of** the things that I think is most interesting is to listen in on the subject of conversation between these two men from the Church Triumphant and their Lord. **Luke says, Moses** and Elijah, who appeared in glory, spoke about Jesus' death... **His exodus. Death then is** a subject worthy... **not only** of the Church here on earth... **but even** of the heavenly realm.

Indeed, Jesus Himself, having descended from His heavenly home... **spoke of** His own death, His own departure. "**The Son of Man (He said) must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.**" **Talk about amazing ... here the** Son of Man... **God in the Flesh... ventures to** take death upon Himself in order to defeat it... **to take away** its sting and its power.

Here death is considered of such a primary importance that God Himself comes to experience it... **leaving us** with the incredible truth that in Jerusalem... **on the** cross of Calvary **it is not just that a man dies... but rather** that God dies. **Yes, death as** a consequence for sin so stirred our God that Moses and Elijah conversed about it on the Mount of Transfiguration even as Jesus prepared to make His way to Jerusalem in order to meet death head on... **to destroy** it by rendering it powerless to destroy.

The earthly figures in the Gospel seem unconcerned about the whole subject of death. **Peter and his** friends, were lulled to sleep on the Mount of Transfiguration. **I am sure it** wasn't that they never thought about death... **there own** or anybody else's, for that matter... **but it** was, at least at that moment a subject that was far from

their minds. **Perhaps with Jesus** having not yet made His way to Jerusalem they thought that His death could yet be fended off.

And so it is, like Peter and his friends...**that the** whole world tries to ignore death... **thinking that** death can be somehow fended off. **Death never really** becomes an issue until it happens and people are forced to acknowledge it. **For some, who** are quite unprepared for it... **it becomes** truly the threat of **deepest despair, pain and hopelessness**.

For our part... what shall we in the Church offer them? **Will we be** so bold as to speak of death **and to offer** the One and only hope for life ...**or will** we shy away from the subject offering instead practical wisdom for our every day life?

As the Church who lives with the reality of death ...**we don't** need to be gloomy in our outlook on life... **we don't** need to live looking like death is our only concern...**as if** nothing else mattered...**or as if** that is all we think about. **In fact, because** we are prepared to die we are truly prepared to live.

Jesus prepared Simon Peter to live when He put into his heart the true confession of faith ... **the only** hope for life in the world that is yet to come. **Back in verse 20** of this same chapter in Luke's Gospel Jesus had asked Peter "**who do you say that I am?**" Peter confessed, "**The Christ of God.**" **And with that** statement... **that confession** of faith... **Peter showed** himself prepared to die **and prepared** to live... **for in** that confession Peter laid claim to Jesus' death on his behalf... **which meant** that He laid claim too to the abundant life that Christ came to give. "**I have come, Jesus said, that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.**"

And it is, of course, the same confession of faith that Jesus lays in our hearts that allows us to speak so boldly of death even as... **in Him we live... and move** and have our very being. **Every time there is a baptism or even when we come to worship... the Church** earnestly confronts death as we are privileged to gather around this font to witness the death of the old man in every one of us who is baptized. **This as God... through His** means... **prepares each** of us for death... **making each** one of us an heir of His everlasting Kingdom... **giving us** the promise and the certain expectation of the resurrection of all flesh... **He also prepares** each of us for life... **for here** He gives us that Divine confession of faith that also came from the lips of one Simon Peter. "**Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God**" ...**and for Christ...each one** of us becomes the one in whom He is well pleased.

And so here we all are today, prepared to live because we are prepared to die. **Lent will soon** be upon us... **which means** that Good Friday and the Cross of Jesus are not all that far off. **In life, each** of us will have our own season's of death to deal with... **but through** it all we will hear the voice of Jesus who gently leads us past Good Friday to Easter Sunday. **Like Peter, who** arrived at the Mount of Transfiguration seeing Jesus in all of His glory and wanting to stay there forever... **we will** see Him in that glory as well... **then the** Church's mission will have finally been fulfilled and we will be at rest... **for then** the saying will have come true , "**death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?...Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**" In the Name of the father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.... Amen.

Transfiguration Sunday, 2007

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