

SERMON

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Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, IL

Transfiguration of Our Lord, A - February 15, 2026

Exodus 24:8-18 2 Peter 1:16-21 Matthew 17:1-9

We were created to live in an intimate relationship with God.

- Think of the biblical description of Adam and Eve before the Fall into sin,
- walking and talking with God in that paradise of a garden.
- Think of the words of our Lord Jesus, through whom and for whom all things were made
- teaching His followers how to talk with God by addressing Him as “Father”.

When that intended relationship is denied or broken by us,

- we sense, often very soon, that something is missing in life.

If our relationship with God is broken or missing altogether,

- most often we allow something else to fill that hole in our souls.
- Someone else, or some passion-- like golf.
- Maybe a social or political cause,
- or, for some, alcohol or drugs;
- or for others, going off the rails morally
- to a kind of train crash that usually also injures others.

In today’s Gospel, we hear about Simon Peter, James and John.

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Jesus had taken them with him up the Mount of Transfiguration

- to witness one of the most dramatic spiritual scenes in history.

Long before in Old Testament times,

- Moses had ascended Mt. Sinai
- to receive the Ten Commandments,
- and had left behind his closest advisors.

But now when Jesus comes into THIS place of God's special revelation,

- He takes with him these common fishermen
- whom He had called to become his disciples.

They did not have any high religious positions in the Temple

- the center of faith in those days,
- positions that we might assume qualified them to be there..

Can we even begin to imagine

- what it was like to stand in those disciples' sandals
- before all that mystery and divine glory?

Seeing the GREAT Old Testament leaders Moses and Elijah,

- who had lived hundreds of years before,
- alive and well.

Seeing the face and clothing of Jesus transformed with dazzling light....

Special spiritual experiences do occur in our day.

Famous Christian scholar and writer J. B. Phillips

- once was confined to an hospital bed after a difficult and long operation--

-“unable,” as he writes, “to move a finger nor blink an eye-lid.”....

- Yet he was fully conscious.

Late one night he overheard a doctor say quietly to the night-nurse,

“I am afraid he won’t live till the morning.”

Phillips fell asleep.

- In his sleep, he had a vivid dream.

- when a figure in white appeared before him.

- After trudging through a miserable landscape filled with junk,

- Phillips glimpsed a beautiful land across a stream with a bridge.

This figure, whom Dr. Phillips described

- as supremely gentle but absolutely authoritative,

- looked at him smiling, but gently shook his head,

- indicating that he could NOT cross over that bridge.

Phillips writes,

“It is nearly forty years since the night of that dream, but I can only say that it remains as true and clear to me today as it was then.

“Words are almost useless as a means to describe what I saw and felt, even though I have attempted to use them.

“I can only record my conviction that I saw reality that night, the bright sparkly fringe of the world that is eternal.

“The vision has never faded.”

What are we to make of such an experience?

- Was it just an easily explainable dream?
- Was it sent from God?

For Phillips, it was life-changing.....

- and his continuing life in this world
- which in his dream he desperately wanted to leave
- was one with enormous contributions--
- especially in making the Bible available in everyday language--
- in the “Phillips Paraphrase”.

But what about that yearning that at times

- also **many** Christians experience--
- that yearning deep inside for some kind of additional spiritual confirmation
- that God is TRULY with them--
- very personally guiding them, caring for them
- like a child in the family.

Even the finest of Christians sometimes experience

- going through “dry” spiritual times.
- I remember my own pastor, when I was in Confirmation class,
- telling us to expect them.

They are times when

- when the best of sermons seem to miss the mark for a Christian,
- and prayers do not come easily,
- and when even Scripture reading seems without effect--
- and that person may FEEL hopelessly distant from the living God.

Most Christians--

- and certainly Lutheran Christians
- have been taught that faith is not to be equated with feelings,
- or emotions,
- feelings which can easily be used by Satan himself to deceive us,
- just as Satan might use a dream for his purposes.

Christ crucified and risen,

- God's Word in the flesh
- and God's written living Word with its center, the living Christ,
- is our only sure foundation.

Faith is simple trust in that Word.

- Receiving God's instructions and promises with child-like trust.

Yet I think we can all sympathize

- with Peter's wanting to stay on that mountaintop with the Lord Jesus--
- basking in the light of that unmatched spiritual experience--

- having that type of experience
- as the norm of a true disciple's life....

But especially notice what happened next.

Jesus went down the mountain!

His ministry was to hurting sinners,

- and His disciples were to follow Him THERE.

As soon as Jesus came off the mountain,

- He was met by a man who had an epileptic son.
- The boy's seizures were so sudden and violent
- that his loving family was very fearful they would be fatal to him.

What a sad and ugly scene--

- especially when compared to the mountaintop.

Yet on that mountaintop Peter had affirmed for him

- by a voice from heaven
- what he had already said about Jesus once before in Caesarea:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

And there were also these added words:

“Listen to HIM.”

That same Jesus Christ, beloved Son of God,

- was teaching them AND US

- that WE are to be at work in the valley
- if we are to be with Him in this world.

Did not Jesus clearly say,

“Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brothers, you have done it to Me?”

The LEAST of these.

- People whose needs are so great
- that they may be repulsive.
- Problem-people who threaten to drain us of all time and energy
- if we begin to be involved.

Right there we are to see Him,

- and in them we are invited to love Him.

As a pastor, I have served in some very troubled congregations.

- And in those congregations I have had to attend
- some very discouraging, energy-draining, conflict-filled meetings--
- after which I have felt literally beat up and exhausted--
- tempted to resign.

The best cure for that exhaustion,

- which I eventually discovered, was the next day
- while I was still feeling down and out
- to go and visit a shut-in or someone in the hospital--

- someone in need.

Such ministry revived me

- when my human nature was loudly telling me just to give up.

“Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these....”

That’s the spiritual “experience”

- our Lord Jesus clearly wants each and every one of us to have.

- It’s there, in those who need us, that we can still say,

“Lord, ‘tis good to be here”-- WITH YOU.

Most of us are already tending to the needs of others

- some of us in our daily work,

- or in our family live.

What if we were to decide to do those very things,

- which sometimes we find tedious or boring,

- out of love for Jesus?

- Serving Him right there,

How might that change our whole view of life?

When we do help others with that reason for caring in mind,

- it is the sort like bouncing a ball against a wall.

- The love comes back to us....

- and we are given just what we need to go on.

It can be a very difficult walk down the mountain.

- The ugliness should not be minimized.

- It can often be painful even to behold.

But above all let's never forget

- that our Lord Jesus walked down that mountain to serve and save US,

- even when we feel like we must be the spiritually least of His disciples.

Even when we feel like something is missing,

- and we are disappointed with our own lackluster spiritual life

- and more than likely troubled with the power of sin over us.

He has been faithful even when we have been faith-less--

- the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

“‘Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Yet we may not remain;
But since THOU bidst us leave the mount,
COME WITH US to the plain.”

- LSB 414

He will answer that prayer for each and every one of us.

We can take those steps down with faith in His promises.

We will meet Him there.

In reality.

- A real presence.

- Not just an emotional high.

- Not a passing vision.

Something much better than all that.

- And it is FOR YOU.

- The Lord Jesus inviting you to be with Him--

- to fill what is missing with a real-life relationship with God.

So please, when you leave this place today, do NOT miss out.

Go on **down** there, with Him.

And now He comes to strengthen us for that time ahead

- by His promised Presence for us as we are

- at His Holy Table.

And the peace of God, which far surpasses our human understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.