

The Necessity of the Cross

Luke 9:28-36 28 Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

29 As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.

30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah,

31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

32 But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.

33 Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah "-- not knowing what he said.

34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud.

35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

36 When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

Is it easier to go up or down a hill?

Back when I ran cross country in high school, there was one infamous hill in Durand. It was steep and high and it was all sand. It was by far the most difficult course that we ran.

As difficult as it is to run up hill, running down hill can often be much more difficult. It's hard on your knees. You have to fight to maintain control. Running downhill correctly puts you right on the edge of falling. It sounds counterintuitive but many runners will tell you they prefer running uphill to down.

Going down the hill is sometimes a lot harder, and in our text today I think there is little doubt that going down the mountain was the harder task, but it was necessary. It was necessary for Christ to head down the mountain to the cross and his death and calvary.

The mountain of transfiguration is the culmination of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

Advent - It shows us Christ who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. There are Moses and Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, and here is Christ the one they waited for.

Christmas - It shows us Jesus as true God and true Man. The gift sent by the Father for all men.

Epiphany - It shows us Jesus, the only begotten son of God, full of power and glory.

But it also points ahead to Lent and Good Friday. It was His death that they came to discuss.

And even Easter, for it was a little foretaste of what was to come.

Peter foolishly tried to make it all about the glory of the moment. And yes, we've all been there. Tired or confused or in a stressful situation, we say something foolish. Peter was afraid and confused. He said something foolish. Peter didn't understand the necessity of going down to Calvary. He didn't understand the necessity of the cross and often neither do we.

We often wish that our life could be one on top of the world. We often wish our life was one filled with the glory of the Mountain of Transfiguration. We forget that the life of Christ and of those who wish to follow him is of necessity a life headed down the hill. Away from the glory of the Mt of Transfiguration directly towards the suffering of Calvary. As Christ says "take up your cross and follow me."

Why is the cross necessary? Why must Christ leave the mountain for the cross? Why is a Christian life so often filled with suffering?

The Cross is necessary because of our sin

"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each one to his own way and he has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus could have remained there in the glory of the mount of transfiguration. He could have continued higher, ascending up into heaven to be again with his Father. He chose to leave the glory and set his face towards Calvary. He did this for us. Our sin caused his suffering.

Yet we are so quick to complain when there is any suffering in our life. When we have to go through minor aches and bruises. When we suffer minor humiliation. When anything bad happens to us. We are so quick to say, why me? I don't deserve this.

You are right you don't deserve this. What you deserve is the death. You might not get the glory of the mount of transfiguration, but then again neither have you received the suffering of the death of calvary. Jesus went to calvary for our sin. Why should we complain if there are minor crosses in our life.

The cross is necessary because of love

On the mount of transfiguration we see the glory of God revealed in a bright light, in dark clouds, in the voice from heaven, in power. But the greater glory is down the mountain at Calvary. There the glory of God is revealed not in power but in love.

The disciples missed it. They saw the face and clothes shining bright. They saw Moses and Elijah. They heard the voice of the Father. But they missed the true glory of Christ. For the true glory was the view down the mountain towards calvary and the wooden cross that stands upon it.

Jesus laid aside all riches and power and glory and comfort and walked down alone from the mount of transfiguration to be the sacrifice that takes away our sin.

We like children playing king of the mountain can remain scrabbling and pulling at one another to try and stay on top the longest. Or we can lay aside the glory of this earth and head down the mountain, pick up our crosses and follow Jesus.

There is an earthly glory in being on top of the mountain the longest. There is an earthly glory in strength and power. But heavenly glory comes from serving our neighbor in humility and love.

A good example is what we talked about last week.

Forgiving often means bearing a cross. Forgiving another often means that we bear the consequence of their sin.

For example, Forgiveness sometimes means that we do not make certain that everyone knows it was his/her fault. Which means that maybe we are blamed. Yet forgiveness accepts this, not

just as an onerous duty, but gladly willingly rejoicing that I have the opportunity to bear this cross for so and so.

Finally the cross is necessary because through it we are perfected and refined

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name above every other name.”

The glory of the mount of transfiguration seems splendid indeed but it is nothing compared to the glory of calvary. It was through his suffering that Christ according to his human nature was then exalted to the right hand of God.

It is through His cross that we become sons of the kingdom. Because of the cross of Christ heaven is ours. We are going to get there, but only through the valley of the shadow of death. It is through Christ's cross that we gain heaven. It is through our crosses that we are refined to shine like gold.

In the Women of Faith meeting we read of a lady who learned not only to accept cancer if it was God's will but to actually be thankful for it. She understood that through her cancer God had given her opportunities and changed her in ways for the better that never would have happened without it.

The cross is necessary for Christ and for us. We must go down the mountain. But we don't have to always stay down there. The mountain of transfiguration is always there whenever we need a break. “Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest.” We can always go up the mountain to pray with Jesus. There it is that we can receive comfort from those who have gone before, Moses and Elijah. There it is that we can hear the Word of God. It is here in word and sacrament, in daily devotions and in the divine service that Jesus waits for us. He waits to give us forgiveness. He waits to speak from heaven with the voice that calls us sons of God. He waits to give us a small foretaste of the glory that follows.

Amen