

“Shining the Light”  
Transfiguration of Our Lord  
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Salem Lutheran Church  
By  
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Some of you have heard me tell of an experience I had while I was serving my first congregation, St. James Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Florida. A famous Contemporary Christian singer came to town for a special event, held in a Baptist Church. It was a concert, but it was very different from any other of his concerts that I had ever attended. He performed by himself, no band, no backup singers. But he talked more than he sang and played the piano. He told stories about how he came to write certain songs, he talked about what songs he liked to sing and which ones he didn't. After the concert, he then went to a Christian bookstore in another part of Jacksonville. There he answered questions from about 50 people. One question in particular stands out in my mind.

A young man raised his hand and began by saying “I have a friend who...” which could mean he was actually talking about himself, but that's just speculation. He continued by saying that his friend had accepted Jesus Christ into his heart, which was a very emotional, wonderful, moment for him. And in the glow of that event, he lived out his faith. But then sin began creeping back into his life. He began doubting his own salvation. So he asked Jesus Christ back into his heart, and he started the process over again. But again he became discouraged by his sinful ways and doubted his salvation. This process happened again and again, and so this young man asked the artist to suggest to him what passage from the Bible he could share with his friend to help him.

The artist simply wasn't able to suggest any passage to help off the top of his head, probably because he wasn't expecting that kind of question, though he did suggest that the man's friend talk to a pastor. However, I'm ashamed to say that while I know several passages to address that issue, I didn't talk to the young man, and I hope and pray that whoever it was who was in despair found the assurance he was looking for. I hope that someone told him that what he was experiencing was a natural consequence of placing his faith on the emotional high of a mountain-top experience.

Thinking back to our Gospel lesson, who can even guess how exciting and awe-inspiring it would be to be there on that mountain with Peter, James and John, to see the glory of God shining through and around Jesus, to see Moses and Elijah, to hear the voice of God once more declaring Jesus to be God's Son? It's no wonder that Peter, James, and John wanted to stay on the mountain in the presence of Christ, Moses, and Elijah, far from the cares of the rest of the world.

We crave mountain-top experiences, those moments in which we most fully feel the presence of God with us, those moments in which we know with the greatest surety our purpose in life and our place in God's plans. Some people cling to their own mountain-top experiences long after they've been over, trying to hold onto that burst of emotion. Others go back, again and again, to the mountain, hoping to experience again the joy and wonder. And while the occasional mountain-top experience can be a help in our Christian walk, to place too much emphasis on them can be detrimental to our spiritual health, as that young man in the Christian bookstore in Jacksonville found out.

I can't tell you enough how important it is that Jesus did not remain on that mountain top, and that what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about was the shame and agony of the cross, not the joy and excitement of the mountain-top. And we follow Jesus, Peter, James, and John from the mountain to the valley, to continue our journey to the cross and beyond through the season of Lent, culminating on Good Friday. But we also follow that same journey every time we leave this sanctuary at the end of the service to go back outside, back to our homes, back to our workplaces, back to our schools, back to our chores and errands and appointments. And we don't go empty handed, because we go with the light of Christ within us, which shines forth as we make positive differences in the lives of others in our daily lives.

Through our Baptisms we too have been transfigured in the eyes of God, so that when God sees us, He sees us as we were meant to be. Yes, sin and death still haunt our lives, but we have been given the gift of knowing that they do not have the last word in our lives, and our salvation does not depend on how we feel about it at any given time. So I encourage you to open further your eyes, open further your hands, open further your hearts, so that the Godly light within can shine more brightly forth upon those who live in the shadows of the valley. I know I've had to learn to be more bold in the sharing of the Gospel, and I'd like to think that if I were in a similar situation as I was almost 10 years ago in Jacksonville, that I wouldn't keep to myself the hope that might have made a difference in that person's life. Yet we have opportunities like that each and every day, just not always so obvious, and whether you realize it or not you are already making a difference in those around you. So bright children of God, let us walk boldly down the mountain into the valley, bringing the Gospel of Jesus with us wherever we go. Amen.