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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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Transfiguration of Our Lord

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I want to get a bit philosophical today in our sermon.

For I want to talk about a certain phrase in our gospel reading.

Indeed, I want to talk specifically about Peter's words in this passage from Matthew.

I want to talk about the meaning of "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

Why does Peter say that?

What is Peter implying?

What does Peter mean?

PAUSE

Now, as we know, this scene in Matthew's gospel is known as the Transfiguration of our Lord.

It is the scene in which Jesus is changed in appearance.

Jesus goes up on a mountain with his disciples and we are told that Jesus' appearance suddenly changes.

Jesus' face begins to shine like the sun.

And Jesus' clothes suddenly become a dazzling white.

And then, as if that were not enough...

Moses and Elijah, two personages who stem from way back in the Old Testament.

Yes, suddenly, in addition to Jesus miraculous transformation, Moses and Elijah, appear out of nowhere.

And then...AND THEN, we have those famous words from Peter, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”

Why does he say that?

What does he imply?

What does he mean?

PAUSE

Now, Biblical scholars tend to believe that Peter does not know what he is saying here.

Scholars tend to feel that Peter is just overwhelmed by the moment and that Peter just blurts out these words.

In particular, scholars note that Peter’s suggestion to set up three dwellings, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, is completely misplaced.

That Peter is just speaking without thinking, just speaking whatever pops into his mind, “Let us make three dwellings.”

But Jesus doesn’t reprimand Peter for it, as he reprimands him elsewhere.

For instance, telling Peter to “Get behind me, Satan,” when Peter rebukes Jesus shortly after Peter’s Confession that Jesus is the Messiah.

We remember in that passage, Jesus tells the disciples that the Messiah must undergo great suffering, be rejected, and killed.

Peter doesn’t like this image of the Messiah—that image of a Messiah who will suffer and die.

In fact, it makes no sense, since God’s Messiah was expected to lead God’s people against their oppressors, namely the Romans who were occupying the Holy Land at that time.

So, Peter rebukes Jesus, which leads to Jesus rebuking Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.”

And so, yes, Peter has a track record for speaking without thinking.

And this passage here in Matthew...

Today's passage is probably in keeping with that theme.

Peter speaks without thinking.

"Lord, it is good for us to be here. I will make three dwellings."

Nope. This is not part of the plan, Peter.

We are not setting up camp here on the mountain.

Jesus' mission is to go to Jerusalem, and you and the disciples are going with him.

So you can't hunker down on the mountain.

PAUSE

But, maybe, just maybe, Peter's words are valid.

Maybe Peter's words are spot on.

At least the part where Peter says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

Surely, Jesus would not have lead Peter and James and John up the mountain to witness his Transfiguration if it were not a good thing.

Surely, Jesus would not have bothered to invite Peter and the others to observe these things, if it were a bad thing.

So, yes, Peter's words, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," are valid.

And, why is it good?

And this is the philosophical part, right?

What does "good" mean anyway?

It is moral. It is right. Is that why it is "good"?

But, by whose definition of morality or rightness do we define "good"?

Interestingly enough, there was a recent article in Penn Live regarding a lawsuit brought by parents against the West Shore School District.

The article caught my attention in particular because this is my school district; my children attended West Shore schools.

And this lawsuit centers around the “Character Strong” social skills curriculum, which is intended to teach compassion, or dare I say, is intended to teach children to be “good.”

I guess schools are realizing that short of parents bringing their children to places of worship to instill “good” in their children, school have had to take up the baton.

But, the problem apparently is that certain parents in the West Shore school district have a different definition of what is "good."

In specific, certain parents are against the curriculum because and I quote, “Not every human is deserving of my child’s empathy.”

“Not every human is deserving of my child’s empathy.”

WOW! When I heard that, I didn’t even know how to respond.

Except to say, one person’s definition of “good” or “compassion,” in this case, is not the same as the next person’s definition.

And, we can’t get into the whole host of definitions of “good” that are out there, or we could be here all morning.

But let me just offer this definition of “good.”

Something is good if it is God-ordained, or to say it another way, something is good if it is stamped with God’s grace.

Something is good if God decides that that something is good.

So, in the story of creation, God creates, God brings life and the world into being, God ordains, God enacts creation, and so it is good.

God created humans, for example, male and female, and God said, “It is good,” and so yes, every person is deserving of compassion, every person is deserving of having “good” expressed toward him or her.

Yes, in the story of creation, God declares over and over again, “Behold, it is good.”

Martin Luther also subscribed to this definition of good, that is, something is good if it is God-ordained.

Luther said it this way, "If God told me to eat dung, not only would I do it, I would know that it is GOOD for me."

What God ordains, tells us, what God does, is good, PERIOD.

And thus, the fact that Jesus leads Peter and the others up the mountain to witness the Transfiguration...this is good, because it is God-ordained.

And Peter's words then are indeed spot on, "It is good for us to be here."

And sisters and brothers, this then is a good compass for navigating life.

Whatever is God-ordained, whatever is stamped with God's grace, is good and good for us to pursue.

Whatever is God-ordained is good for us to seek, to embrace, and to partake of.

And the Transfiguration of our Lord...well, that may just be the single most important GOOD thing.

Why, you ask?

Because Jesus is giving Peter and the others a vision of Jesus' redemption.

Jesus is transfigured, because Jesus is revealing an image of his resurrection glory.

That is why Jesus is transfigured.

That is why Jesus is transformed before the very eyes of Peter and the others.

That is why Jesus takes his disciples up on the mountain.

It is indeed a very good thing that the disciples witness this.

Peter's words are spot-on, even if he can't fully grasp the significance of the moment.

Even if he can't understand the magnitude of the experience.

To be sure, he can't, he won't fully understand until Jesus is raised from the dead.

Which is why Jesus tells him and the others not to say anything about this experience until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

The disciples won't understand this vision of profound goodness for humanity and for all creation...

The disciples won't understand God's redemption until after the resurrection.

They won't understand until after Jesus has conquered sin and death by rising from the dead.

They just won't understand until then.

PAUSE

Again, this scene in Matthew's gospel, this scene of the Transfiguration of our Lord, may just be the single most important GOOD thing.

Because we are given here a glimpse of redemption glory.

And we, we, as people of God, we are privy to this vision again today.

We are privy to this good thing.

And we then, like Peter, should declare as well, "How good Lord it is for us to be here, today!"

Of all the places in the vastness of the universe...

And of all the places on this pale blue dot, that is our planet earth that travels through the immense blackness of space...

Of all the places throughout space...

Here, in church, as we ride on our surface of earth through our Milky Way Galaxy...

Here, in church, in this little building, on this planet in the universe, hearing again of our Lord's transfiguration...

Here is a very, VERY good place to be.

Where else should we rather be on a Sunday morning?

This is God-ordained. We are exactly where we ought to be at this very hour in the great cosmos.

We are exactly where we ought to be, and it is good.

That is a great comfort, is it not?

To know that you are doing exactly what you are supposed to be doing, when you are supposed to be doing it.

Lord, it is good for us to be here, in this place, in this time.

That, in truth, is what any of us, what any human being really, is wont to know in any given moment of our lives, right?

We want to know, "What am I supposed to be doing? Where am I supposed to be?"

What is the compass for my life? How can I be sure I am fulfilling the call to do and to be good?

I warned you that I was going to get a bit philosophical today.

Well, the good we are called to do and to be in life starts here with the vision of God's redemption.

Indeed, this vision started way back at the time of our baptism into Christ Jesus, when we were baptized into the ultimate good, which is the very body of our Lord.

Yes, the Transfiguration of Jesus connects back to Jesus' baptism, for at both events, we hear the words "This is my Son, the Beloved."

That is not by accident. This isn't just a nice coincidence.

No, those words, "This is my Son, the Beloved," is supposed to remind us that God's redemption of all creation and of all humanity is made personal, is made real for us as individuals through our individual baptism.

You and I have been baptized, and in that ritual of baptism, the vision of God's redemption has been revealed to us personally.

And so now, we are always in the right place at the right time doing the right thing, doing good, IF we live out baptismal calling faithfully.

What God has ordained is good. And God has ordained that you and I should be children of God. That is what baptism is about. You and I are good through the gift of baptism.

And that is our compass, that is how we navigate life, that is how we do good, by fulfilling God's call to each of us which was declared at our baptism.

God has ordained that we should be his children, and so we ourselves are good.

And so, Friends, be good, do good, by living the vision of redemption that is in your very baptized person.

Thanks be to God. Amen.