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Our Saviour/St. Stephen
Transfiguration of Our Lord
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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.

“It is good for us to be here.”

These are the words spoken by Peter to Jesus in our gospel text today.

“It is good for us to be here.”

These are the words of Peter spoken on that high mountain.

The words that issue forth from Peter after having just witnessed Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus.

The words that issue forth from Peter after having just seen Jesus transfigured in appearance, such that Jesus' clothes became a dazzling white.

“It is good for us to be here.”

Now this is quite peculiar, right?

I mean it is not often you see two important, biblical figures who lived centuries CENTURIES before...

It is not often you see two figures from long ago suddenly appear and holding a conversation.

And, it is not often you see a person begin to shine with such amazing brilliance.

It is not often you see such things.

Nor is it common to be overshadowed by a cloud and to hear a voice from that cloud.

These are strange things to be sure.

And all Peter can say is, “It is good for us to be here.”

But the text says, “Peter did not know what to say, because he and his companions were terrified.”

I would be, too.

PAUSE

Now, this Sunday of the Transfiguration...

This event in the life of Jesus Christ is often called a mountaintop experience.

Yes, in life, there are highs and there are lows.

Yes, in life, there are valleys and there are hills.

And there are mountaintop experiences.

There are moments, there are events, there are occasions when we experience pinnacles, zeniths, highpoints.

Yes, there are times when we know a mountaintop experience.

And this gospel text today is just such an experience.

And all we can say is, “It is good for US to be here.”

PAUSE

But, what exactly is this mountaintop experience?

What exactly is going on in our gospel text?

Why does Jesus suddenly begin to shine?

Why do Moses and Elijah make a cameo?

Why does a voice from the cloud declare, “This is my Son”?

For what reason do all these things take place?

Just this...

So that, we know what is to be in the future.

So that, we have confidence of what will be.

You see, sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus here in this text is Jesus as he is at the time of his resurrection.

And so, we get a foreshadowing of Easter here in this gospel text.

We get a foreshadowing of the risen Lord in this passage...

This is Jesus as he is at the time of his resurrection...

...who will shine in glory...

...who is indeed "God's Son" ...

...who will, when he ascends back to God the Father, who will hold counsel with the likes of Moses and Elijah, two characters in the Bible who are said to have never died, but came to heaven nevertheless...

Yes, this scene on the mountaintop is a depiction of what will be, it is a depiction of the glory of Christ resurrected, which hasn't happened in the gospel...yet.

It hasn't happened yet.

Which is why, when they are coming back down the mountain, Jesus tells Peter, James, and John, not to say anything about what they have just experienced, that is until after the Son of Man has risen from the dead.

Not that Peter, James, and John understood what just happened anyway.

PAUSE

But Jesus is making the point that the glory of his resurrection CANNOT be fully understood until after his suffering and death on the cross.

Truly, the glory of the resurrection makes no sense without the suffering and death of Christ on the cross.

That is the point, that the glory of the resurrection is about Jesus having first died on the cross for our sins, and then rising, rising in victory over the power of death.

So, the glory of the Transfiguration cannot be understood until later...until Easter.

PAUSE

But so then, why even bother having the Transfiguration?

I mean, if this event on the mountain won't make any sense any way, until after Jesus is raised, why bother with it now or at all?

PAUSE

Except that, sisters and brothers in Christ, Lent is just around the corner.

You see, when Jesus and his disciples come down the mountain...

When Jesus leaves the Transfiguration behind him, he now sets his sights firmly on Jerusalem, where he will be crucified.

The rest of the Gospel of Mark, some eight chapters...

The rest of the Gospel of Mark is really all about Jesus' journey to his cross and resurrection.

And in the life of the contemporary church, we call this time Lent, which begins this week with Ash Wednesday.

Lent is the season when the Church itself journeys with Christ to his cross and resurrection.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord then is the transitional Sunday.

It is the time of the year when begin to prepare for the solemn journey we make with our Lord.

And I think there may be no better way to prepare for the oncoming of Lent than having the vision of Christ's glory there before our very eyes.

PAUSE

For Lent is difficult. Lent is challenging. Lent is a time of deep soul-searching.

Lent beckons us to look inward, so that we might struggle with our personal brokenness.

Lent would have us peer inside and repent, and repent, and repent some more.

And just so we don't lose all hope, with all that repenting, with all that soul-searching...

Just so we don't lose all hope during the difficult journey of Lent, the vision of Christ's glory from this Sunday of the Transfiguration is there to remind us that on the other side of Lent is the new and risen life of Christ awaiting us.

Yes, there is the great promise of hope, even in Lent.

Even when we are full of sorrow and bent over by the weight of sin...

Even when we are burdened by our brokenness and iniquity...

Even so, there is hope in Lent.

This is what the vision of the Transfiguration reminds us, of the hope that is always there.

PAUSE

And as we noted that life is filled with highs...and lows.

That life is filled with hills...and valleys.

Hope is with us in the forgiveness and in the assurance of God's presence in Christ Jesus throughout the journey of Lent and throughout the journey of life, with all its ups and downs.

PAUSE

There is a certain image that reminds me of this truth.

It is an image of this ever-present hope, which comes from the time Kathy and I travelled to Germany back in 2001, some twenty-plus years ago.

During our trip, we went hiking with some friends.

And I remember it was a rather grueling hike.

It was absolutely harrowing at times to say the least.

For we found ourselves literally on a hiking path not much wider than say two feet, with the side of the mountain on our one side, and nothing but a sheer drop on the other.

No guide lines, no guard rails, just a vertical descent, which even now I don't like to contemplate.

And I remember almost hugging the mountain side, as we made our way slowly and methodically.

But then ever so often we would pass hikers coming the other way down the mountain on this narrow path, only they had the inside of the path closest to the mountain face, so we found ourselves at times holding onto nothing.

It was terrifying.

For one wrong step and...

PAUSE

But then, I also remember that when we got to the top of the mountain, there was a bit of an open area to walk around quite safely and where we then could enjoy all the different vistas.

And it was spectacular.

And most interesting of all, at the top of the mountain there was planted a large, metal cross.

And sitting by that cross with Kathy and our friends, sitting there looking out beyond us, we noticed something.

We could see across to the other mountain peaks far off in the distance, for we were not just sitting on a single mountain, but we were sitting among a whole series of mountains...

And there upon each mountain peak way out in the distance was another cross.

A cross straight ahead, way out in the distance, visible on that other mountain peak.

A cross to our left and to our right, way out in the distance, visible atop those various mountain peaks.

And it was as if God had literally touched each of those peaks with his presence, so as to confirm that God was already there even before any climber reach all those various summits.

It was truly awe-inspiring.

PAUSE

I think about that hiking trip at times, especially when I think about mountaintop experiences, and especially when I think about hope.

Hope is knowing that God is already there before we even get there.

And hope is knowing that God is there with us along the way.

Again, this is what the Sunday of the Transfiguration is all about.

We have the vision of hope, the vision of Jesus' glorious resurrection before our eyes, even before we take our first step into the Lenten season.

And Jesus is there with us throughout life, always ahead of us already there, before we get to our destinations.

Jesus is there in our hills and valleys, in our highs and lows.

And thus, wherever we are, but most especially here in Church where God arrives even before we get here—yes, wherever we are, we can proclaim, “It is good for us to be here,” because God is there with us, and there is hope.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.