

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Earlier last month, I went on a pastor's retreat entitled "Take Heart! Strength and Confidence for Demanding Days" run by the Lutheran organization Doxology which is an organization in our synod dedicated to the support and health of pastors and their churches. I'm not sure if anyone from Synod is listening to this sermon, but the retreat was paid for by our national church body. Thank you, LCMS Office of National Mission. Join us next week during education hour to learn more about the retreat and what the Doxology program stands for.

It was certainly a refreshing retreat: a wonderful chance to learn at the feet of a world class theologian and a world class psychologist, a wonderful chance to be comforted by the company of brother pastors, and a wonderful chance to hear again those words of forgiveness read, preached, and sung in the twice daily prayer services.

I remember well what Dr. Bev Yahnke, our speaker who is an expert psychologist, said of these times in which we live. She said, "In these times there is no one clear salutary sanctioned pathway forward." Can you relate to that in your life? And so we ask When do things get to go back to normal? What should our mask policy be? Should we offer snacks or not? Should we have Bible studies on Zoom or in person? Questions like these multiply. In many ways we feel as though we're fumbling through the dark. But on this Transfiguration Sunday, we can take heart knowing JESUS GIVES LIGHT TO WALK THROUGH THE DARKNESS.

**"And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them."**

I. Jesus gives His disciples light to walk through the darkness. It's no secret that the Transfiguration was a mountaintop experience for Peter, James, and John. Jesus literally gave them light as his clothes became whiter than anyone's clothes could be bleached. Not only that, "**And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.**" All of a sudden, three Jewish boys see Moses and Elijah, two all-stars in the story of God's people.

Have you ever met a celebrity or a personal hero? Did you shake his or her hand? Did you get a photo with him or her? Maybe ask for his or her autograph? You must have felt like a million bucks. Every time that person comes up in a

conversation, you want to interject, “Hey, I *met* that person.” I once met a celebrity and my profile picture for years was that picture with that star.

Imagine that feeling, but on steroids for Peter, James, and John. Who was in every Bible story when they were little kids? Moses and Elijah! Who did they want to be like when they grew up, Moses and Elijah! What an enlightening experience!

Yet more enlightening than that is what the Father says: “**And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”**”

Jesus gave the disciples the light. He not only shone brightly. He not only gave the disciples a glimpse into a heavenly conversation with Moses and Elijah, but more than all of that, He gave His disciples the brightest light possible, the command, “**This is my beloved Son; listen to him.**”

If only they knew. If only the disciples knew that after this encounter, Jesus’ ministry would soon take a turn for the worst: Jesus would enter Jerusalem and the minds of evil men would be working on overdrive to ensnare Jesus. If only the disciples knew that Jesus would soon be arrested, tortured, and crucified. If only the disciples knew that it wouldn’t be long before they were scattered, terrified, and even Peter—the I would never deny you disciple—would disown Jesus three times. If only they knew.

Yet the Father knew. Their Heavenly Father gave them the light of the Transfiguration so that they had something to cling onto as the events of Holy Week would terrify and scatter the disciples. Jesus gave Peter this glorious experience so that Peter would have something to encourage him even after he disowned His Savior on Good Friday. You cannot see the mount of Transfiguration without looking also to the darkness of mount Calvary.

Whenever Jesus leads His disciples in darkness, He doesn’t leave them there. There is always light around the corner. You cannot see the mount of Transfiguration without also looking to the empty Tomb. “**And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”**” This Transfiguration gives the disciples the light they need to get them to the other side of the crucifixion, that is, Easter morning.

Likewise, II. Jesus gives His Church light to walk through the darkness. Often, I will look through my filing system of old sermons to remind myself what I preached to you in previous months and years. I pulled out the sermon from this time last year for last Transfiguration Sunday, and here is the first line:

“WHEN YOU’RE IN THE DARKNESS, DON’T DOUBT WHAT GOD HAS TOLD YOU IN THE LIGHT. That is to say, when you’re in the midst of

hard times, tribulations, and doubts, don't reject the promises that our Lord has made as clear as day to you."

Those were words from this very pulpit on February 23, 2020. If only we knew. If only we knew that in less than 30 days a virus nanometers wide would shut down worship services across our country. If only we knew that Easter would be spent in our living rooms glued to a computer or television screen. If only we knew our focus wouldn't be on Jesus whose radiant clothes were bleach white, but rather our focus would instead turn to bleach disinfecting wipes, and the white coats in the hospitals and clinics across the globe. If only we knew.

Yet the Father knew. The past twelve months and all their trials and tribulations were not a surprise to our God who rules the Heavens and the Earth. In all of this, the Father has been saying—the same thing He said on the Transfiguration mount, by the way— "**This is my beloved Son; listen to him.**" The Father knew all of this would happen, and He has been using this time as a time to focus our eyes upon Jesus to provide us light and life.

When humans lose one of their five senses, the other four are strengthened to take their place. In this time when our foresight has been clouded, it is a time to strengthen our hearing as we listen to Jesus. It's a time to strengthen our tastebuds as we taste and see that the Lord is good. At the retreat, Dr. Bev Yahnke said, "In these times there is no one clear salutary sanctioned pathway forward." She went on to say, "Yet there are many reasonable ways to move forward with Baptismal grace."

And so it is we move forward with Baptismal grace. In Baptism, the Lord has claimed you as His own. He has called you a beloved son, a beloved daughter. In Baptism, you have been clothed in those same robes of Christ's righteousness—robes whiter than any dry cleaner could bleach.

In these days of pandemic, there is forgiveness for mistakes we've made. There is grace for our shortcomings. Our God simply invites us to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Words. It is these Words which are a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. On this Transfiguration Sunday, we remember whenever Jesus leads His Church in darkness, He doesn't leave them there.

We have the promise of better days ahead, if not in this life, in the life of the world to come. Even on this Sunday before Lent, we already look to Easter and the resurrection of all flesh wherein we'll meet Moses and Elijah, Peter, James, and John, fellow saints and loved ones who died in the faith, and most importantly Jesus Christ Himself.

Finally, I would be remiss not to take advantage of the fact that today is Valentine's Day. III. Jesus gives Christian couples light to walk through the darkness. Anyone who has been married knows that it is not all a mountaintop, Transfiguration mount experience. There are light times and dark times. Take some

time to look at a picture of you and your spouse from your wedding day. How do you look? You look radiant! You'll see a groom with a thousand dollar smile and a bride wearing a dress "**intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach it.**" Maybe you'll look at the picture and say, "If only that couple knew."

If only that couple knew every day wouldn't be a wedding celebration or a valentine's day dinner. If only that couple knew how hard it would be once the kids came along. If only that couple knew how much of a strain long hours at the office would take on the relationship. If only that couple knew how those sins would turn into betrayals that might nearly rip the family apart. If only that couple knew back then what we know now.

Yet your Heavenly Father knew. He is the God who abounds in steadfast love. On this Valentine's Day, let this be a chance to recount the Lord's love for you and a chance for you to recount the Lord's love for your spouse. He knows every twist and turn your marriage took and will take until death do us part.

Let all our relationships, whether they be romantic, friendship, or family, let all of them be informed and strengthened by our Transfiguration Lord Jesus to whom the Father calls us to listen. Let all of us let Jesus' shine light in our relationships through His words of forgiveness, and He promises that He will guide us even through the darkest of days.

**JESUS GIVES LIGHT TO WALK THROUGH THE DARKNESS.** As we go through this life, let us listen to Jesus and cling tightly to His promises as a lamp in a dark place, that we may never be found doubting, discouraged, or dismayed.