

February 23, 2020

II Peter 1:16-19; Matthew 17:1-9:

"The Transfiguration Will Tide You Over"

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Are you “down in the dumps?” You find the word “dumps” in the Dutch and German languages. For the Dutch it has the idea of being in “a mental haze or dullness.” For the Germans, it means to be “heavy or gloomy.” The earliest use of the word of which I am aware is Sir Thomas More’s *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, written in 1529. He writes, “What heaps of heaviness, hath of late fallen among us already, with which some of our poor family be fallen into such dumps.”

Wouldn’t you prefer “to be on cloud nine?” That’s an interesting expression that’s hard to pin down. The phrase - “to be on cloud nine” - generally means that someone is so elated that they are on the highest cloud, close to heaven. With all of the clouds in the sky, why did they choose number nine? Most likely it comes from *The International Cloud Atlas*, written in 1896. Ten types of clouds were listed. Cumulonimbus was number nine on the list. It is the tallest of all cloud types. So, to be on cloud nine is to be on the highest cloud in the sky.

It doesn’t takes a genius to figure out that most people would prefer to be elated (on cloud nine) rather than full of heaviness and gloom (down in the dumps). We Christians talk about life in this real, fallen world. Nothing in life remains untouched by sin and death which can wreak havoc on one’s attitude. Oftentimes, we are striving for “cloud nine.” Or, maybe a more Biblical way of saying it is that we are looking for “a mountaintop experience.” We would just like to feel good - all the time. Like Peter, we want to find a good place. Sometimes we spend a lot of our lives looking for an experience of the transcendent (beyond the physical) that will forever change our perspective on life and thereby change our sad existence into one that is constantly full of contentment and happiness.

Perhaps the hardest thing for us as Christians to realize is that there will always be a tension between being “down in the dumps” and wanting “a mountaintop experience” as long as we are down here. Psalm 42 captures this tension and even points us to the only solution.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night ... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God ... My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you ... Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life ... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God

Did you catch the incredible back and forth tension in the Psalm? There is thirsty longing to be with God and a feeling of being downcast because God seems to be so very far away. We want to be with him. Tears are food day and night. But we shouldn’t be downcast because there is hope in God. There is salvation in him who saves us whenever we remember. But it seems that even when we remember, he is

against us as the waves of life beat against our very existence. Still the Lord commands his steadfast love, that is, we are to believe that he is always good to us in the promise of the Savior, and we are bid to even sing a prayer. Such prayer is a cry for help as all prayer acknowledges our inability to do anything apart from the one who saves. Again the question rises into the mind of the inspired author as he asks himself (and we ask ourselves with him), "Why are you in turmoil?" And the Psalm then reminds us again of the hope - the anticipation that we are to have in being with God, and speaking and singing of his salvation that delivers us from all the pain of the down here. We are to always look forward to being with God.

In this Psalm, there is much to be said about those words, "By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me ..." They are all about faith in the one we know to be Jesus Christ and his cross. As the apostle John writes, "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us (1 John 3:23)." And the apostle Peter declares that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)." So, in the tension that we experience between the dumps and the mountaintop, we are to live by faith, which is able to navigate in a life where we talk about good and bad times, although, as I said, there isn't anything that isn't touched by sin and death. And so the child of God looks forward to the passing away of what we presently know while anticipating the future. As it says, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4)."

So, as we live in the meantime, waiting and waiting for the fulfillment of faith and hope, where do we rest? We rest in the word of promise of which we believe and anticipate will come to pass. In our Gospel lesson for this morning, we have a real mountaintop experience. What Peter, James, and John see is not only for them, but for us. Through their eye witnessing of his majesty we believe, and are also made certain of these things through the prophetic word of the Old Testament. In these, we have a lamp shining in a dark place. As Peter, James, and John beheld his majesty, so we see by what they say and what we know from the Old Testament Scripture. As Peter urges, we will do well to "pay attention as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts ... (2 Peter 1:16-21)." Like them, we walk down the mountain to go back to the heaviness and gloom of the down here, yet we take with us a strengthening of faith and hope in all that has been revealed.

The glimpse of heaven that they see in Moses and Elijah and the transfiguration of Jesus, coupled with the promises of the Old Testament, are designed "to tide us over" until the day we reach the fulfillment of the transfiguration of Jesus in us. Again, it is designed "to tide us over" until the moment when we become like Christ. As you can see, we are faced with another expression today that helps us to understand our lesson ... "tiding over."

The original "tiding over" was a seafaring term and derives ultimately from "tide" being synonymous with "time." The literal meaning was "in the absence of wind to fill the sails, float with the tide." This usage was recorded by the English seaman Captain John Smith who is known for his part in establishing Jamestown, Virginia. He wrote in *A Sea Grammar*, 1627: "To tide over to a place, is to go over with the tide of ebb or flood, and stop the contrary by anchoring till the next tide."

To be a Christian in this life is to be like a sailing ship without any wind. But Christ has given us what we need and so we are tide over. What we do have is the tide. Certainly, we would prefer to have the wind in our sails, but for now, the tide is going to have to do. To say it in a different way, we wish to be in heaven with Jesus in his glory, but for now, the testimony of the apostles and the Old Testament is going to have to be enough to get us through the dumps. We would like to live the transfiguration of Jesus right now and forever, but we are going to have to move along with simply the promise of it. So, there will always be a tension between having everything in Jesus, but feeling like we don't have anything at all.

You see, regardless of faith in Christ, we are in the process of getting old. We are physically dying. Our bones creak and crack, skin begins to sag, hair is turning grey, life is in the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23) which is about eternal death in hell. But, what the disciples see in Jesus is their future. What they communicate to us is our future. This will tide us over. Luther describes it in such a way that teaches us to push back the dumps and rejoice in the recorded mountaintop that speaks of what is to come. He gives us four extraordinary thoughts from the text that serves as our tide. He writes:

First, the resurrection of the dead and the future glory and brightness of our bodies are shown. Secondly, there is added the appearance of Moses and Elijah, who prove by their appearing that they had never really died, and that there is yet another life, besides the earthly life, from which they were transferred. Thirdly, this appearance teaches us also that we should despise death, and look upon it merely as an emigration or a sleep. In short, this appearance proves that this life is nothing at all in comparison with the future life. Fourthly, this appearance proves that sin is overcome. For it necessarily follows as an incontrovertible conclusion, that, where death is overcome, there sin is also overcome.

These are extremely comforting truths that are designed to push back the dumps. **The Transfiguration Will Tide You Over.** What we have is a preview of Christ's resurrection as well as our own. This is designed to strengthen our faith and keep us from giving up when so much is against us. The only God who saves us, the Triune God, is going to do it. Luther focuses on this: "The whole, holy Trinity appears here to strengthen the believers; namely, Christ in his transfigured form, the Father in the voice, and the Holy Spirit in the bright cloud." Indeed! Your tide is in the saving name of the Triune God, placed upon you in your Baptism. This will tide you over until the wind hits your sails - on the day when you are forever in the full majesty of Christ.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

https://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/24/messages/1080.html

<http://www.weathergamut.com/2011/10/14/cloud-nine/>

<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/tide-over.html>