

February 19, 2023

2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

“Majesty and Agony”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For a brief moment in our Gospel lesson the majesty of our Savior shines! We are told that Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John "... and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light." The three apostles were eyewitnesses of his majesty! Jesus shines with the light and brilliance of heavenly divinity so that even his earthly clothing was transfigured in the same manner as his face. Moses and Elijah are there. They represent the law/instruction and all prophecy that Jesus must fulfill. They stand before Jesus as a reminder of the agony that he must face in Jerusalem so that we may receive the benefits of his majesty.

The effect on Peter is dramatic. In the presence of the heavenly divinity he felt as though he were in heaven and wanted to keep it down here. But we are also told in Mark's gospel that he did not know what to say, for he and the other apostles were terrified. This was because of all that was resting on Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah. They were terrified as they heard the voice that was borne to him in the Majestic Glory: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." As it was for Peter so it is for us. There is both **Majesty and Agony** in the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a mixture of **Majesty and Agony**. Peter was babbling foolishness when he offered to build three shelters on earth: one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. Like Peter we are always trying to capture heaven on earth as we struggle with only having the majesty of Jesus by faith. Faith is sure hope and certainty of what we do not see. Then the terror sets in when we finally realize that agony comes before majesty. The words of Paul capture this when he writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

"So we do not lose heart." And yet it often feels as if we are losing heart, doesn't it? Like Peter we know what we have in Jesus, but we must go down from the mountain top to the valley of facing the rest of our life down here. And some of us are in deep valleys of trouble and discouragement today. And if we are not there today we will be tomorrow. Illness and death. Trouble with work and having enough income. Family arguments and the divisions that come with all of that. Social and Political unrest. Unfaithful friends and the scars that never go away. Struggles with sin.

The agonies of life can be destructive to our faith. The story is told of one demon in hell who had great success in eroding the faith of Jesus' followers. Other demons tried to discover the tool he used and to buy it at great price, but to no avail. Finally he named the tool. "It is discouragement," he said, "and it is successful because it gives up on God." I don't know about you but there sure does seem to be an increase in discouragement when I look around at what I see in others and in myself. This thing called sin, and the agony that it brings, sure does work to overwhelm the majesty that is ours by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, how then should we see things? Can we say it and mean it as the apostle Paul says it and means it in 2 Corinthians 4:17? What were those words again? “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.” So how does this come into play so that we do not lose heart? Perhaps we should start with Jesus and what the transfiguration meant for him. We hardly ever consider it that way, that the transfiguration was also for Jesus. Lest we forget, he was also in the middle of the **Majesty and Agony** as one of us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus! The Transfiguration strengthened Jesus for what was ahead. In the middle of his moment of majesty, he was mindful of the glory that is forever his, with the Father, and that this glory was to be shared with others. There is great joy set before Jesus. And the glorified presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountain both reminded Jesus of what needed to be done, and that this meant everything for them. A similar thing can be said for the apostles who were living on the side of agony. Jesus will endure the agony of the cross - their sin and all its consequences - even despising the shame because he knows the relief and forever life it will bring. This was also his consideration for you and me. We are a part of his joy that caused him to endure our agony that we might have his majesty!

The voice of the Father reassures Jesus that he is still his beloved Son, as declared earlier at his baptism. The eternal plan for the salvation of the fallen world has not changed. It is proceeding according to the Father’s will. In all the agony that was ahead, Jesus could hold onto the day of transfiguration and be strengthened to accomplish everything. The Father was with Him. We hold onto our baptism and the transfiguration of Jesus to be reassured that we are adopted children of the Father with an inheritance that is in keeping with what we see in Jesus our brother.

The three apostles who were on the mountain, and the other disciples who were not there, would be deeply troubled in the days that were ahead. They would go through the crucifixion and death of their Lord and would then face untold agonies throughout their respective ministries. They would have to face their struggles with sin. But all of them could look back at what three of them saw. They would remember as John remembered in his gospel: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The disciples needed that reassurance and we need that reassurance too. Thus, the words were written for us.

Consider Jesus who endured all of your agony so that you may share in his majesty. You have it now by faith, but will one day have it so that all agony will disappear. In that wonderful truth, we are bid to lift up our drooping heads and strengthen our weak knees in the reconciliation of Jesus. He will not desert us. He did not desert his disciples. As their inner being was renewed, so is ours in the forgiveness of sins and gift of eternal life. And, as they looked forward to the complete thing, we are invited to do likewise. And we will not be disappointed!

After reminding us of the glory he saw on the mountain in our epistle lesson, Peter declares that we are no less favored than those before us. He writes: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his

majesty ... And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Those are beautiful words. So true! We are in a dark place. Thank God we have a shining lamp! We have the eye-witness testimony of the apostles that Jesus was transformed. We have the promises of the Old Testament and the fulfillment in the New and that we drink. And what we believe today and look forward to in the future will be ours on the day when our Lord Jesus returns. Discouraged? Perhaps. Give up on Jesus? Never! And, if we have been faithless, let us remember that he is faithful and speaks in our defense!

As Jesus came to his apostles and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear,” so does he touch us saying the same thing in the gospel and sacraments. Indeed! As we go to the gospel and sacraments, the mountain of transfiguration is here for us by faith. And he who was transfigured and went through agony for us at the cross will see us through this valley called life that we may be raised from the dead and see him in his majesty! And as his clothing became white as light, so will his majesty permeate us that we may be in the bliss of heaven! For now, as it was for Jesus and his disciples of the past, **Majesty and Agony** will be our lot. However, one day, the agony will end and it will only be majesty! Luther writes:

The resurrection of the dead and the future glory and brightness of our bodies are shown. For this was something very remarkable, that Christ was transfigured while yet in the mortal body, which was subject to suffering. What then shall it be, when mortality shall have been swallowed up, and nothing shall remain but immortality and glory?

Indeed! What then shall it be? Though we do not fully know, there is one thing for sure: It will be wonderful and the agony will be remembered no more!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott