

Children

Good morning, boys and girls. I brought some baseball cards to show you today. Do you know who these guys are? (Name off the baseball players and the teams they play for) These are all famous baseball players. Wouldn't it be neat to meet some of these guys? Wouldn't that be cool? What would you do? Would you shake their hands? Would you get your picture taken with them? Maybe you'd even get them to sign their autograph for you. It's always exciting when we get to meet famous people. There are so many things you'd want to say to them.

Our Bible story today is about something like that. Jesus took three of His disciples Peter, James, and John and went up on a mountain to pray to God. While Jesus was praying, Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared. Now Moses and Elijah were heroes! They were some of the most famous people around. But they'd been dead hundreds of years. How did they get there? God sent them there to talk to Jesus. When Peter, James, and John saw this, they couldn't believe it! They were so shocked! If God had sent Moses and Elijah to talk to Jesus, then Jesus must be the Son of God. Let's pray and ask God to open our eyes, so that we'll know who Jesus is, too.

Object: Bring a "glow in the dark" cross. As an option, a cross for each child. They can be bought at a Christian supply store or craft store.

I have something to show you this morning. [Show the cross.] It just looks like an ordinary cross, doesn't it? Can I make it change? Yes, by exposing it to light, it will glow in the dark. [If it is possible to make your room dark, do so now so that the cross will glow.]

The whole appearance changes, doesn't it? [If you cannot make the room dark, just talk about how it glows in the dark. The children have surely all seen this happen anyway.]

In our Bible lesson today we learn of a time when Jesus' appearance changed. Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, up to the mountain to pray. While he was praying, his clothes became white and gleaming and His face looked different. Two other men, men that the disciples recognized as Moses and Elijah, were there with Jesus. A voice came out of a cloud and said, "This is My Son; listen to Him." After they heard the voice, Moses and Elijah were gone. Jesus was there alone. The disciples didn't tell anyone what they had seen. I think it was just too awesome. [If you have crosses for the children, pass them out now and say: "When you look at your cross, remember that Jesus' appearance changed too and God said for us to listen to Him."]

Object: An optical illusion [example - a drawing of a box that looks three dimensional; or use - (there is a picture in the printed book only) both lines are same length, but bottom line appears larger].

Good morning, boys and girls. Today is a very special day in the church. We call this day Transfiguration Day, and I want to help you understand something about it. Maybe you will remember the story about when Jesus went up into a mountain with three of his disciples, and while they were there they were visited by Moses and Elijah. The

disciples were amazed because Moses and Elijah had been dead for years, but they returned to bring a message from God to Jesus about his death. Then there was a beautiful light that surrounded Jesus and a voice from God that called Jesus his Son. The disciples were so amazed that they rubbed their eyes and looked again and again to make sure that what they saw was real. I can't imagine how impressed they must have been. Have you ever looked at one thing and thought that you saw another? It happens all the time.

Sometimes things seem to be hidden from us even though we know that they are there. Have you ever seen an optical illusion? Do you know what an optical illusion is? [Let them answer.] I brought one along with me this morning and I want you to take a good look at it. If you stare at it long enough it will seem to take different shapes and it will be open at different ends. The same piece will be closed and you will not be able to see what you have seen before. We call this an optical illusion.

The same thing happens to people because of the devil and his tricks. The teachings of God are like a beautiful light and they shine on all of us all of the time. But when we let the devil work with us instead of God we cannot see the light. We know that it is there and we look for it, but the devil makes us blind.

It is this way with lots of people because they work with the devil instead of with God. The disciples saw the light so bright that they could never forget it. They remembered it and called it the day of Transfiguration. We see the light of Jesus when we follow his teachings and keep his love. Everything seems right and bright and good. But let the devil go to work, and the next thing we know the light is gone and everything seems dark. It is like an optical illusion. One moment the light is here and the next moment it can be gone. We must always be alert to the love of God and stay away for the Devil's tricks.

I

"Twins, a sister and brother were talking to each other in the womb. The little sister said to the little brother, 'I believe that there is life after birth!' Her brother protested: 'No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling on to the cord that feeds us.' But the little girl insisted: 'There must be something more than this dark place, there must be something else where there is light and freedom to move.' Still she could not convince her twin brother. Then...after some silence, she said hesitantly: 'I have something else to say, and I am afraid you won't believe that either, but I think there is a mother!' Her little brother now became furious: 'A mother, a mother, what are you talking about? I have never seen a mother and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have so let's be content.' The little sister finally said: 'Don't you feel this pressure sometimes? Its really unpleasant and sometimes even painful.' 'Yes,' he answered, 'what's special about that?' 'Well,' the sister said, 'I think this pressure is there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face!

Don't you think that's exciting!"

(Unfortunately I do not know the source.)

In that story the twin brother did not believe there was anything beyond what he could see and hear and touch while his twin sister believed there was a life beyond what she could see and hear and touch. That story reminds me of life. We are like the twin sister, we say "we are only passing through," meaning that this life is preparing for eternal life. We live in strange times with lots of tragedies and appalling accidents and many people dying young. During times like this we need more than ever to remember that our lives here on earth are a pilgrimage to God. We are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father since baptism. Like the girl in the womb who could not see her mother, we too believe that eternal life follows this life and that there is more to this life than we can see and hear and touch.

On the mountain Peter, James and John saw that there was more to Jesus than met the eye. During the transfiguration they got a glimpse of the future glory of Jesus' resurrection. Like them we too get glimpses of the presence of God in our lives. We get glimpses of God in the love we receive from other people. We get glimpses of God when badly needed help suddenly comes to us from out of nowhere. We get glimpses of God when we look back over our lives and what we couldn't understand in the past makes sense now. We see glimpses of God when we see someone making a sacrifice to help somebody else. We see glimpses of God in the beauty of a fine day, a nice beach or a beautiful sunrise or sunset. We see glimpses of God when a passage from the Bible or a homily strikes a cord in our hearts. We get a glimpse of God when we spend time in prayer and experience the loving presence of God in our lives. We get more than just a glimpse of God when we receive the body of Jesus in Holy Communion. The Transfiguration coming early in Lent encourages us to continue our Lenten penances because it reminds us of the glory of Jesus risen from the dead. When Jesus and the disciples came down the mountain Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about his transfiguration until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Of course they did not know what he meant. Unknown to them the glory of Jesus' transfiguration was preparing them to accept the scandal of the cross.

There are some great truths you only discover through experience. Recently, I ran across a "fascinating list" that carried this intriguing title: "Great Truths About Life That Little Children Have Learned." Let me share a few of these "great truths" with you.

- (1) "No matter how hard you try you cannot baptize a cat."
- (2) "When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair."
- (3) "Never ask your 3-year-old brother to hold a tomato... or an egg."
- (4) "You can't trust dogs to watch your food for you."
- (5) "Don't sneeze when somebody is cutting your hair."

(6) "School lunches stick to the wall."

(7) "You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk."

(8) "Never wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts... no matter how cute the underwear is."

They would understand this only afterwards when looking back. The good times take us through the bad times. So when our cross is heavy or when we are tempted to despair about the meaning of life, let us look beyond the pain of the present moment and remember those times when we got glimpses of God, those times when God sent us his consolations. Let us look beyond the pain of life and see the presence of God in our world, and the offer of life that God wants to make to each of us. Let us look beyond the illusion of happiness that this life offers to the real happiness that God offers us. Let us look beyond this world to eternal life with God. As we heard in the second reading today,

With me bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy. (2 Tim 1:8-9)

In our first reading we heard Abram being called by God to leave his present place and go to a new country. (Gen 12:1-4) He was seventy-five when called to leave his own country but he had to wait another twenty-five years for the promised son Isaac to be born so that the promise of future descendants could be fulfilled. That was a long wait. It was a long time for him to be continually looking beyond the present to the promise of God. With faith we can see what we cannot see with our eyes. The girl in the womb knew there was more to what she could see and hear and touch. On the mountain Peter, James and John looked beyond the appearance of Jesus and saw his future risen glory. Let us look beyond, and see that God is really with us. God has not left us on our own, God is with us.

Those personal experiences of God's love remind us that heaven is our destiny and that we too like Jesus will be transfigured after death. Paul wrote,

"our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body ..." (Phil 3:20-21)

Jesus returns from the dead and meets his disciples in different places: the garden, the Emmaus Road, the seashore, the Upper Room. He witnesses to them that he is alive, this guy back from the dead with a body. He isn't content to send them a postcard from heaven: HAVING A GREAT TIME. WISH YOU WERE HERE. No. He shows up among them as his own witness. Not airy spirits or pious ghosts, but bodies like his own with wounds to show, bodies that witness to resurrection, threatening the world with life. For the only Easter some people may ever see is the Easter they see in you and me.

The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain is also awaiting each of us after death.

Why can we look forward to being transfigured after death like Jesus? Because we are baptized. When we were baptized God put his seal on us. What was that seal? The Holy Spirit. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit on the day we were baptized. We were marked out as God's property, belonging to God. Let us hold our heads high. When the media or your friends criticize the Church and make you look foolish because you are still a practicing Catholic, hold your head high. Because you have been baptized Jesus

will transfigure our wretched bodies into copies of his glorious body. Can the media do that for you? No. They have not put the seal of the Holy Spirit on you. They have not marked you out for God, as God's property. They have not claimed you for God as his son or daughter. But when you were baptized you were sealed with the Holy Spirit as God's own child.

On the mountain Peter, James and John had a privileged experience of Jesus' transfiguration. Instead we are like the girl in the womb, living by faith and not by sight, believing that there is more to life than meets the eye. Therefore we can hold our heads high because we were sealed with God's Holy Spirit on the day we were baptized. We treasure those moments - little transfigurations - when we experience God's personal love for us, knowing that they tell us heaven is our destiny and that Jesus will transfigure our wretched bodies into copies of his glorious body.

II

There is an absurd story that comes out of World War II. An American soldier in Tunisia lost his bayonet. Rather than face the consequences of admitting he had lost this important weapon, he carved an excellent facsimile out of wood and placed it in the scabbard at his side.

For weeks he went about his duties carrying this fake bayonet. He was safe from getting into trouble as long as his deception went undetected. However, one day the much dreaded order came from his sergeant, "Fix bayonets." That meant he would have to show his bayonet. Thinking quickly, the soldier hatched a plan. When the order was given, he simply stood still, not moving a muscle. The sergeant demanded an explanation.

"It's a promise I made to my father," said the guilty but creative soldier. "As my father lay on his deathbed," he continued, "I told him I would never bare a bayonet on the anniversary of his death. Today is that day"

"That's the most outlandish fish story I ever heard," thundered the sergeant. "Let me see that bayonet."

As the soldier somberly drew the bayonet, he declared loudly, "For breaking a solemn promise may the Lord turn this bayonet to wood!" And with that, he drew his fake bayonet. (1)

Now that was a quick-thinking soldier. But he was right about one thing--it's never good to break a solemn promise.

Our lesson for this second Sunday in Lent concerns a promise--a promise that God made to Abraham. At the time this promise was made, Abraham was still known as Abram. The writer of Genesis begins our story like this, "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'"

Now we might rightfully ask, "After what?" The writer begins by saying "After this . . ." What is he referring to that happened immediately before Abram's vision?

In the preceding chapter we see Abram in a heroic light. His nephew Lot had been kidnapped by a plundering alliance of four kings who had defeated Sodom. But Abram raised a small army and set out to rescue Lot. And he did rescue him. Afterwards Abram met with Melchizedek, the great High Priest and gave him a tithe of all the goods

he had captured from the armies of the four kings. He refused to take even a fraction of the goods which had been plundered.

In this chapter we see Abram at his finest. It is then that God comes to him and speaks to him: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." That's interesting, don't you think? God is saying, "Don't be afraid" to a man who just had an incredible military victory over four hostile kings. Abram should be on top of the world. But you see, despite that victory, there is a lingering concern in Abram's heart. Despite the many victories that God has given him, he still has some reluctance in his relationship with God. God had promised him that he would father a great people. Yet he and his wife Sarai remained childless.

Being childless was seen as a sign of divine judgment in Old Testament theology (Leviticus 20:20-21; 1 Samuel 1:11; Jeremiah 22:30). Abram was concerned that a member of his household might have to one day be his heir. It was not uncommon in that time for a childless couple to adopt a servant as their heir. Abram saw that as his only viable option because he had no child of his own. In his mind God had forgotten His promise. After all, he and his wife Sarai were getting old. There were some things that even God could not change.

You certainly can't blame Abram for his concern. So when God says to Abram, "I am your shield, your very great reward," Abram responds to God like this: "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

In his infinite wisdom Abram was trying to show God, as far as he could tell, this was the only way things could possibly work. God didn't come through, so Abram says to God, "Look, here's where things stand. The only possible way out of this situation is for me to choose a slave as my heir."

Have you ever done that? "Lord, I don't see any way this can possibly work out. Here's what you need to do . . ." And we explain to the infinite God what He must do.

We are so predictable . . . and our faith is so pathetic.

Then the word of the Lord came to Abram: "This man will not be your heir," God says to him, "but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." Then the Lord took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then God said to Abram, "So shall your offspring be."

Then the writer of Genesis adds these words, "Abram believed the Lord, and [the Lord] credited it to him as righteousness."

With the victory that God had given Abram over the four kings as a backdrop, we see how tenuous Abram's faith really was. No matter how many times God had been with him in the past, Abram had difficulty trusting God in his present circumstances. And that's often true of you and me as well.

The greatest need you and I have is the need to trust God. We've talked about this many times before, but it's true: our greatest need is to trust God. No matter how difficult our circumstances, God will never forget us nor forsake us.

Pastor Tony Evans tells a wonderful story that comes from one of the *Superman* movies. I know some of you grew up on Superman comics or television shows or movies. "Look up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane. It's Superman!"

In this particular movie, Superman saves a man from a burning building. He rescues him from the top floor and is carrying him to safety by flying through the skies. The man looks at Superman and then looks down to the ground. "I'm scared, Superman," he says. "Look how far down that is."

At this point Superman gives him a great answer. It's the answer of faith. Superman says, "Now if I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?" (2)

That sounds very much like God's response to Abram. It also sounds very much like God's response to you and me when we're about to lose heart.

Have you ever felt desperate about a situation? Felt like your back was against a wall? Couldn't sleep at night because that need was on your mind? Maybe it was a situation regarding your work or one of your children, or your spouse. Maybe it was you yourself who needed an outright miracle because there seemed no humanly possible solution to your situation. Have you been in that place? The next time that happens think of the words of Superman and apply them to God: "If I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?"

All of us have found ourselves in a troubling place. And then, just at that moment when we were inclined to give up, God has come through with some act of hope and promise. And for a while we felt a renewed sense of faith and joy. But, as time goes by, we forget. And then we find ourselves in a difficult spot again. We see no way out and so, once again, we doubt God's presence and love. When will we learn? God can be counted on. God keeps His promises.

There are times in our lives when our faith is tested by our life circumstances.

Remember how we said last week when we began our Lenten journey that life's tests are not designed to weaken us, but to help us grow stronger in our faith journey. We said that about temptation, but that's true about all of life's difficult moments as well.

God asks us to trust Him. He tells us about the victory that will be ours if we will just give Him our cares and concerns, but He rarely gives us the full details of the process involved to get us to that victory. It is then that God asks us to trust Him. As Superman said to the person he was carrying, "Now if I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?"

Abram's faith was fragile, but God's promises are rock solid. We need to remember that. Like Abram, we do not always see how God will work things out in our behalf. Abram was approaching old age and his wife was also reaching an advanced age. They didn't see how it would be possible that they would ever have an heir that was their own. But one day, God delivered on His promise. God always delivers on His promises.

Pastor Ray Stedman once told about a good friend of his from another country who, along with his wife, was going through a time of deep trouble. The wife was struggling with severe physical problems arising from asthma and bronchitis. If any of you have ever had difficulty breathing, you know how frightening that can be. This couple struggled for years with her condition. They longed to go back to their own country, but her sickness kept getting in the way.

One day Stedman reminded his friend, whose name was Mark, of the time Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Stedman summed up for Mark the lesson from this story. "Remember, Mark," he said, "the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last

forever. That is [what] having faith [is all about]--to remember those facts." The boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever. Mark thanked Ray Steadman, they prayed together, and Mark left.

Steadman did not see him for a couple of months; then they ran into each other.

Steadman asked, "How are things going? How is your wife?"

Mark replied, "Oh, not much better. She's still having terrible struggles. She can't breathe, and can't take care of the children or the house, and we have a hard time. But I do remember the two things [you said]: the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever!" So Pastor Steadman prayed with Mark again.

Sometime later Steadman received a note from Mark. Mark and his wife had gone back to their home country. There they found the answer to his wife's difficulties. A doctor discovered a minor deficiency in his wife's diet which needed to be remedied. When that was done, the asthma and bronchitis disappeared, and she was in glorious, radiant health, and they were rejoicing together. At the bottom of this note Mark had written, "The boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever."

Later Mark sent word to Steadman that his wife was in the hospital, and the doctors suspected leukemia. Her asthma was under control, but a new storm had broken out in their lives. Steadman could only pray that Mark and his wife would cling once more to those important words: "The boat will not sink; the storm will not last forever." (3)

I hope you and I will remember those helpful words as well. Earlier in Abram's life God had promised him that he would be the father of a great nation. As the years passed, however, he had difficulty holding on to that promise. You and I can relate to his difficulty. There come those times in our lives when we have difficulty holding on to God's promises as well. But God does not fail. We may not see how His plan will unfold, but God will never fail us. "If I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?" "The boat will not sink; the storm will not last forever." But there is one more statement of faith I would like for you to hold on to.

When James Hewett was a small boy growing up in Pennsylvania, his family would often visit his grandparents who lived nine miles away. One night while visiting these grandparents a thick fog settled over the hilly countryside before they started home. Hewitt remembers being terrified. He asked his parents if they shouldn't be going slower than they were. His mother said gently, "Don't worry. Your father knows the way." "You see," Hewett recalls, "Dad had walked that road when there was no gasoline during the war. He had ridden that blacktop on his bicycle to court Mother. And for years he had made these weekly trips to visit his own parents." His father knew the way. James Hewett writes, "How often when I can't see the road of life, and have felt that familiar panic rising in my heart, I have heard the echo of my mother's voice, 'Don't worry. Your father knows the way.'" (4)

That's a good message for each of us. When life seems dark and we don't see any possible way forward, remember, our heavenly Father knows the way. We can trust Him. He will not let us fall.

But there's one final thing we need to say. It is one of the foundations this series of messages is built on. Do not forget that the purpose of all of life's tests is not to defeat us but to make us stronger. This is a truth we are emphasizing in our Lenten journey. God wants us each to grow strong in our mental, emotional and spiritual

lives. And so God has placed us in a world that tests us--but the tests are not designed to defeat us but to make us stronger.

God established a covenant with Abram. He had him look up at the stars and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then He said, "So shall your offspring be." And God kept His promise to Abram even though Abram could see no possible way that could happen.

What promises has God made to you? There are some promises God has made to all of us--the promise to be with us through all our life's journey; the promise to never forget us, nor forsake us; the promise to receive us into our heavenly home when we finish our journey on earth. Friend, you can take God at His word. He has established His covenant with you. Remember this covenant when you face challenges; when you come up against the hard times. Hold on to God's promises. Don't lose faith.

If it helps, hold on to these three simple phrases: "If I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?" . . . "The boat will not sink; the storm will not last forever." . . . "Your Father knows the way." Even better, remember God's words to Abram: "Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them . . . So shall your offspring be." God always keeps His promises.

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1. Walter Winchell, *McNaught Syndicate*, Reader's Digest.
 2. *Tony Evans' Book Of Illustrations* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).
 3. Cited by Pastor Stephen Muncherian, <http://www.muncherian.com/s-mk4v35.html>.
 4. James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 201.

III

Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story about a ship that was in serious trouble in a storm. A passenger on that ship, defying orders, made his way to the pilot, who seeing the fear on the passenger's face gave him a smile of assurance. Relieved, the traveler returned to his cabin and said, "I have seen the face of the pilot. He smiled and all is well."

There are times in life when we need to see our pilot face-to-face. That's what happened in this mystical story that the Church calls the Transfiguration of Christ. Peter, James and John were there. Moses and Elijah showed up from the past. They have an experience that is mystical and out of this world. I want to call to your attention Verse 8 that says, "Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."

"Turn you eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face."

What would a glimpse of Christ himself mean to you today?

I. THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFT.

There is mystery in this story. It's an epiphany, a theophany, an experience of the glory of God, so much that the face of Jesus becomes radiant and his clothes are whiter than bleach could make them.

People pay big money for radiant faces these days. Face lifts are a thriving business. The only problem is that the soul has a way of seeping through. Maxwell Maltz is a plastic surgeon. He's in the business of lifting people's faces, but, Dr. Maltz says, "Even though I get marvelous results, patients are often not happy. I have come to realize that inner scars are much more difficult to remove than outer ones."

Could your soul use a lift today? Has depression, difficulty, duties and daily routines caused your soul to sag, your spirit to falter, your heart to sink? Christ came to lift us.

Contemporary Christian artist, Tim Hughes, wrote a beautiful praise and worship song which goes:

"Light of the world you stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes; let me see.
Beauty that made the heart adore you,
Hope of life spent with you.

So, here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me."

Have you seen Jesus like that? Could your soul use a lift today?

Maybe the lift you need is affirmation. In Verse 7 we read, "Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!'" We have heard this phrase from heaven before; it is there at the baptism of Jesus you remember, but we have a tendency to forget. Now, when Jesus is preparing to travel the road to Jerusalem to the cross, the heavens open one more time and the voice comes to remind His only Son, "You are my beloved child, you belong to Me."

One of life's biggest challenges is to remember that we are the beloved children of God. There are so many voices trying to tell us something different.

I walked into Upper Chesapeake Hospital this week to make a visit and a gentleman standing at the information desk said, "You're a preacher, aren't you?" My collar wasn't showing. "Well, yes," I replied. "How could you tell?" "Well, you walk like a preacher, talk like a preacher, look like a preacher; I just knew." Under my breath I prayed, "Lord, help me." Have so many years of doing this made me look this way? As Abraham Lincoln said everyman over 40 is responsible for his face. Thank goodness I don't have a dog to look like.

We can easily become what we do, what others think, a lifetime accumulation of successes and failures. That's why we need to hear another voice, the voice of God reminding us that we are his beloved children. We don't need to waste a lot of time trying to prove what already is. We just need to lean on His everlasting arms and abide in His unfailing love. We need to realize that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. Remember who you are. Could your soul use a lift today?

II. THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFE.

Peter wanted to make a monument of this mystery. He wanted to build three shrines on the site so visitors for centuries would take note of what happened there, but Jesus will have none of it. In Verse 5, Peter says to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" and then in Verse 6 the Scriptures say, ("He did not know what to say for they were terrified.") Fearful that he could say nothing, Peter just proposes an idea-a building project on the mountain. Oh, Jesus, this has been such a wonderful time in our lives we ought to put a museum up here and pilgrims for centuries would come. I can see them now, by the tour bus loads, they will gather here. We could charge admission and make little replicas of the temples we are building and they would buy them and take them back home as pilgrims do from place to place. Let's just stay up here. It is wonderful. Then Verse 9 says, "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders to keep quiet and go to work." Life is not lived on the mountain top. It's hammered out in the valleys among the people where they hurt and struggle and try to make up their minds what they are going to do. As He led them down the mountain He reminded them not to make a shrine out of this-just keep it to yourselves.

Discipleship is a daily decision to follow. Back in Chapter 8:34- John Peterson translates it, (Message Bible) "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Follow me and I will show you how. Self help is no help at all."

Stores are stocked with books on leadership. There is even a book entitled, Leadership for Dummies. If I attended one-tenth of the leadership seminars that come across my desk I would never be present to minister at the VA. We are a church and society obsessed with leadership.

Jesus had a different idea. He was interested in follower-ship. Before you lead, you must learn to follow. Able leaders emerge from the ranks of able followers. No wonder aggressive, self-starting, self-sufficient citizens of Baltimore/Perryville have difficulty becoming Christian disciples.

I believe it takes at least three things to be a follower.

A. TRUST

Jesus said to his disciples in John 14, "Trust in God. Trust also in me."

Trust is the glue that holds people together. When you trust a person, you have nothing to fear. You can relax, be safe, enjoy each other's company.

That's why it's troubling when people lose their trust in God. Where can they go?

B. TRUTH

Jesus asked his disciples, what's the word on the street? 'Who do people say I am?' 'They say John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet.' Then He personalizes the question. 'What about you?' 'Who do you say I am?' Peter has his finest hour. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Followers are not sheep too dumb to have an opinion. Followers are not "yes people" who tell the leader only what he or she wants to hear. Followers speak the truth in love.

C. TEACHABLE SPIRIT

John 16:13 says, "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things."

There are some things we did not learn in kindergarten. People who know it all may not be as smart as they think they are. Did you ever try to teach somebody something who already knows it all? Tough assignment.

The value of an open mind is its receptivity to different thoughts, further logic, finer discernment.

Disciples know how to follow. Get a life-follow Jesus. What happens is down there where the interactions of people are going on and opinions are being formed and decided. If anyone wants to follow me, get out of the driver's seat and let me lead, says Jesus.

Disciples have a heart to help. "Jesus is greeted by a crowd in the valley" (Verse 14). In that crowd is a man with an epileptic son. When the seizures strike, the kid foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, becomes stiff as a board. The disciples tried to help the boy, but they were powerless. So the father says to Jesus, "If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart to help us" (Verse 22). Jesus does. It seems to me that's what disciples do. They have a heart and help.

Roy Hattersley is a columnist for a London newspaper. He is also an outspoken atheist. But covering the Katrina devastation on our Gulf Coast, the reporter made this observation. "There was a notable absence of rationalists' societies, free-thinker clubs, and atheists' associations, among volunteer relief workers. There was a notable presence of the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and other faith-based groups digging through the rubbish trying to help." Then Roy Hattersley said this, "Christians are the most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others, while others sit around and scoff at religious intellectual absurdity." Did you know all the chaplains who have won the medal of honor are Catholic. They seemingly are more willing to sacrifice for others. It is a tough act to follow let me tell you. (Newport story)

Maybe we Christians haven't done enough to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters who have lost everything, but at least we have done something. That's what

discipleship does. It gives you a heart to help. If you can do anything, Jesus, why don't you do it? Have a heart to help us.

Hattersely's reference to the Salvation Army caused me to recall the story of William Booth. He was a Methodist preacher, too, you know. "Willful Will" they called him, but Booth became disillusioned with the political wrangling of the Methodists. So he left the church and started a Christian mission in the poverty stricken East Side of London that reached out to the worst. That Christian mission became the Salvation Army, which declared war on poverty and homelessness. Or, as William Booth said:

"While women weep, as they do now. I'll fight.
While children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight.
While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,
I'll fight, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end."

That was one hundred years ago. It seems like the kind of war all of us could get behind, the war on poverty, the war on homelessness. Maybe it's time for another William Booth. If you have a heart, help us. Discipleship is a matter of your heart.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face.
He'll give you a lift.
He'll give you a life."

IV

In his most recent book, John Maxwell tells us something quite fascinating about sharks, those fierce leviathans of the deep: sharks only grow as large as their surroundings permit. The shark, strangely enough, is one of the most popular fish for aquariums. The reason for this is that sharks adapt to their environment. If you catch a small shark and confine it, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium in which it lives. Sharks can be six inches long and fully mature. But turn them loose in the ocean and they grow to their normal size. (1) I've noticed the same phenomenon with regard to followers of Jesus Christ. If we are challenged to live heroic lives for Christ, we have that capability. Left unchallenged, however, most of us stay where we are " with an immature understanding of faith and a nominal commitment to Christ.

Our lesson for the day contains one of those growing, stretching experiences that came from time to time for Jesus' disciples. Go with me to the top of a mountain. Jesus is there as are his three most trusted disciples " Peter, James and John. As usual Mark doesn't give us many details about what happened on that mountain. Did they have a time of prayer? Did Jesus lead them in a time of meditation? We don't know. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT SUDDENLY THE DISCIPLES SAW JESUS TRANSFIGURED.

What does that mean " transfigured? We don't know exactly. All we can say is that somehow the disciples saw Jesus transformed into the glorified Christ who will one day reign over all of life. That's about as far as we can go. Right before the disciples' eyes Jesus was elevated to a new plateau.

Those of you who are baseball fans may remember a player by the name of Brooks Robinson, former third baseman of the Baltimore Orioles. Robinson was such a stellar defensive player that he became the standard of excellence for third basemen. It was often said of Brooks that he played third base as if he "came down from a higher league." (2)

It's a crude analogy, but the disciples saw Jesus as if he had come down from a higher league. Mark tells us that Christ's clothes became a dazzling white " whiter, says Mark, than any bleach on earth could get them. Then, says Mark, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Moses, of course, gave the children of Israel the Law. Elijah, on the other hand, was the greatest of the prophets. So, here were the highest representatives of the Law and the Prophets, and the transfigured Jesus was in their company. And the disciples heard a voice: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And the disciples were terrified.

A crucial statement, that: THE DISCIPLES WERE TERRIFIED. We can appreciate their response to this most unusual situation. We would have been terrified, too. We hear about people experiencing strange phenomena " extraterrestrial visitations, out-of-body experiences, etc. " but for the most part these sorts of things haven't happened to us. And we are a little suspicious when they happen to other people.

And we would be suspicious of Peter, James and John's report " except for the way in which it affected their lives. This experience, as well as many other experiences they had with Jesus, transformed them radically. You and I 2,000 years removed can make light of their experience, but it was so very real to them that they gave their lives for Christ, literally! Christ was transfigured " and the disciples were terrified. Why were they terrified? Because they were dealing with something outside their experience. Here was Christ in all his glory. Here was someone in a different league, as it were. Here was someone whose life shone with a beauty and an integrity they did not have. Here was one whose dazzling white robe indicated his holiness, his purity, his uniqueness " and they were but ordinary mortals. And they were afraid.

Being in Christ's presence made them aware of their inadequacy, their imperfection. They were sinners in the presence of one who was sinless. No wonder they were terrified.

While serving aboard a gunboat in Vietnam, Dave Roever was holding a phosphorus grenade some six inches from his face when a sniper's bullet ignited the explosive. In his book, WELCOME HOME, DAVEY, he describes the first time he saw his face after the explosion: "When I looked in that mirror, I saw a monster, not a human being . . . My soul seemed to shrivel up and collapse in on itself, to be sucked into a black hole of despair. I was left with an indescribable and terrifying emptiness. I was alone in the way the souls in hell must feel alone." Finally Roever came back to the States to meet with his young bride, Brenda. Just before Brenda arrived, Roever watched the wife of another burn victim tell her husband that she wanted a divorce. Then Brenda walked in.

"Showing not the slightest tremor of horror or shock," Roever writes, "she bent down and kissed me on what was left of my face. Then she looked me in my good eye,

smiled, and said, Welcome home, Davey! I love you.' To understand what that meant to me you have to know that's what she called me when we were most intimate; she would whisper Davey,' over and over in my ear . . . By using her term of endearment for me, she said, You are my husband. You will always be my husband. You are still my man."
(3)

To understand the grace of God poured out in Jesus Christ, we must first understand our inadequacy, our imperfection, our ugliness, as it were. But the transfigured Christ in all his loveliness, in all his holiness, in all his glory still loves us. There was no need for the disciples to be terrified, but they did not know that. All they could see was Christ's holiness and their own unworthiness. And they were terrified.

THEN THEY WERE TRANSFORMED. That is the second thing we need to see. They were transformed. Oh, not at once. Transformation rarely happens all at once. Don't let anyone mislead you. Few people are genuinely converted completely all in one night. The experience on the Mount of Transfiguration was but one stop on the disciples' pilgrimage to becoming apostles of Jesus Christ. They would share many other important experiences with Christ. All the time, though, something real and important was happening inside them. They were becoming more like the Master. They were becoming more committed to him and to one another. Their faith " which was not even as large as a mustard seed " was growing. They would stumble and lose hold of it from time to time, but they would always come back to it and it would blossom into a mighty faith that would shake the Roman empire. These men would move from being terrified to being terrific. Their faith would grow from being easily intimidated to being almost invincible. They were in the process of being transformed by the presence of the transfigured Christ.

And the same thing can happen to us. Like the disciples we can also be terrified in Christ's presence because we are imperfect, but we soon discover that in his presence we are not without value and we are not without hope. Because Christ loves us, change is possible. This is the heart of today's lesson: The proper response to the transfigured Christ is transformation. To see the transfigured Christ is to be aware not only of our inadequacies but also our possibilities. As he is, so shall we one day be.

Bishop Emerson Colaw writes that during one Lenten season he went to see a drama that portrayed the life of Jesus. The drama, THE MAN BORN TO BE KING, reached its climax in the Crucifixion scene. The three Marys entered and approached the Roman guards. Mary, the mother of Jesus, spoke to the captain requesting permission to minister to the needs of her son. He roughly pushed her away. Then one of the other women came forward and made the same request. But she added some interesting words. She asked the captain to do this "for old times' sake." The captain refused her request also. Then with a sweeping motion of her hand she loosed her golden hair so that it could cascade down her back. "Marcellus," she asked, "have you ever seen hair like this?" And then she thrust out a foot and asked, "And have feet ever danced for you like these feet?"

An incredulous expression came to the captain's face. In amazement he said, "Mary Magdalene, how you have changed!" Slowly, with dramatic emphasis, she turned so that her back was to the audience and she was facing Christ on the cross. Slowly she said, "Yes, Marcellus, I have changed; he changed me!" (4)

To see Christ as he really is is to experience personal transformation.

C. S. Lewis put it quite pointedly: "He (Jesus) never talked vague, idealistic gas. When he said, Be perfect, He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder " in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad." (5)

I like that imagery. Before we experience Christ's transforming power we are unhatched eggs. To experience the transfigured Christ is first of all to be terrified, then it is to be transformed. **AND FINALLY IT IS TO BE TURNED LOOSE " TO BE TURNED LOOSE TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED.** Christ came preaching the Kingdom of God " the reign of God in every heart. And it is to his followers that he has given the commission for the teaching and the preaching of this kingdom. That's you and me. We are to be transformed and then we are to be transformers.

You know how the story of the Mount of Transfiguration ends. Peter wants to build three booths " one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elijah " and stay on that mountain. But it is not Christ's mission to stay on the mountain and be worshiped. His is a ministry of love to the people in the valley below. And that is our ministry as well.

I read recently that when American forces captured Okinawa in World War II, the typical island village was a filthy place. The inhabitants were ignorant and poverty-stricken. But there was a village called Shimmabuke which was different. Its streets and homes were spotlessly clean. Its citizens were friendly and polite. Why was this village so different from the others? Thirty years before, a missionary stopped at Shimmabuke on his way to Japan. He won two men to Christ, Shosei Kina and his brother Mojon, and gave them a Bible. Through them the entire village became Christian and village life was transformed. (6)

That is our ministry. When we have been transformed by the transfigured Christ we catch a vision of what the world could be if we all lived under his Lordship.

No longer would Peter, James and John be content to live in a tiny fishbowl. Christ had called them to bigger and better things. Now it was time for them to reach their full potential as his followers. And friends, it is time for us to escape the fishbowl as well. Suppose you and I had been there with Peter, James and John on the mountaintop when Jesus was transfigured. What would have happened to us? Wouldn't we have been terrified? Wouldn't we have been transformed? Wouldn't we have been turned loose to transform the world for whom Christ died? Friends, the transfigured Christ IS

here. And he is saying to you, do not be terrified but be transformed. Reach your full potential in Christ this day.

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 5. "C. S. Lewis on Holiness," by Jerry L. Walls, *GOOD NEWS*, May/June 1995, p. 30.
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