

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAW ON THE MOUNTAIN WHEN YOU GO TO THE CROSS!

Which “face” of Jesus do you prefer? This picture is the one that you used to see hanging in almost every home. It is a very dignified, glorified face of Christ. It is almost as if his face glows. This is probably one of the most popular paintings of Jesus that you can find. Hook’s head of Christ became instantly popular in the seventies. A real life Jesus. A Jesus that could laugh. A handsome Jesus with a rugged face. A face that didn’t look distant and removed from our humanity. Children could look at this face of Jesus and not be afraid.

But are we somehow offended by the face of Jesus we see on the cross? I don’t know if any of our portraits really paint that picture well. The Passion Story tells us that those who captured Jesus beat him badly. They hit him with their sticks. They beat him with their fists. They pressed a crown of thorns down upon his head. Have you ever seen a picture of Rodney King after his beating? He almost didn’t look human. That’s how Isaiah described Jesus. Isaiah 52: 14-15 (GW): **“Many will be shocked by him. His appearance will be so disfigured that he won’t look like any other man. His looks will be so disfigured that he will hardly look like a human.”**

Today’s story puts a beautiful, wonderful, glorious face on Jesus – the kind of face that would make us sing, “Beautiful Savior, King of Creation, Son of God and Son of Man.” Which face will we choose? We must choose them both, because we can’t really see Jesus on the cross if we don’t see God in the face of Jesus. And we really won’t understand the glory of God if we don’t see God on the cross. As we come to this Lenten season, it is important for us to remember what we see on the mountain today before we go to the cross.

I. It was for Jesus to remember when he went to the cross

We have a time stamp here. It says “after six days.” It was six days after Peter made the wonderful confession about Jesus. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That was the day that Jesus gave his name new significance. You are Peter, which means “rocky” – and on this rock, your confession, I will build my church.

It was also the day that Peter made his terrible “digression.” Jesus started speaking about his suffering and death at the hands of his enemies, and Peter took him aside to rebuke him. “Lord, don’t talk that way. This will never happen to you.” Remember what Jesus said in return? **“Get behind me, Satan! You are stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”** The devil was using Peter to tempt Jesus to give up his mission.

Can we try not to be too hard on Peter? We will always have trouble understanding how Jesus could be fully human and fully divine at the same time. What was it like to have all power in heaven and on earth, and at the same time be tired after a long journey, and not get cranky? What was it like to have people hanging on you from sunup until sundown, and not grow impatient? Remember that Peter and the disciples saw Jesus in those times. They believed he was true God, but did they fully understand what that always meant?

And what was that like for Jesus? He was fully human and fully divine at the same time. He could feed the five thousand by multiplying the bread and the fish. We never hear that he opened up an empty picnic basket and made a meal for himself and his disciples. He never did a single miracle to benefit himself. What did he do when he went hungry? He went hungry and waited until he could find some food. Jesus was fully human and he suffered the same wants and needs that we face every day.

Satan tried to exploit this very thing. In the wilderness when Jesus had nothing to eat for forty days, the devil asks him that question. "If you are the Son of God, then turn this stone into bread." Surely, as the Son of God, Jesus had every right to provide for his need for food. Only, the Son of God didn't come into this world just to be God. The Son of God came into this world to become fully human, so that he could be tempted in every point as we are tempted, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). It would not have been fair for Jesus to cheat whenever he didn't like the feeling of being fully human.

Satan brings this same temptation for Jesus while he was on the cross. What did the enemies of Jesus say, when they taunted him? "If you are the Son of God, then come down from the cross. Save yourself." Within the depths of his soul, Jesus wrestled with this temptation. He cried out in agony, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** Why should the innocent Son of God be beaten and crucified by these rough soldiers? Why should the holy Son of God feel the wrath of God for sins he never committed? Still Jesus did not stop believing in himself as the Son of God, or in his heavenly Father. Read Psalm 22, which gives us Jesus' very thoughts on the cross. **"Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in your even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb, you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help."**

God the Father prepared Jesus for this moment on the mountain of transfiguration. Moses and Elijah were there to give him a pep talk. Luke tells us that they spoke of Jesus departure, about his suffering and his death and no doubt his resurrection as well. In that moment on the mountain, Jesus appeared as God himself in all his glory. His face shone like the sun. Even his clothes glowed with this heavenly light. At his baptism before he began his ministry, Jesus heard his Father's voice. Now before he finishes his mission, God speaks to him again. **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

Can you imagine Jesus remembering these words his Father spoke while he was suffering on the cross? He endured the wrath of God for the sins of the world, the greatest injustice an innocent man could ever experience. Yet he knew his Father loved him. He did not doubt. He did not waver. He carried through the mission all the way to the end, until every last sin in the world was atoned for. Until every last one of our sins had been expunged from our record.

The glory that came in the face of Jesus on the mountain was important before he went to the cross to die. It is also important for us as we make our journey to stand beneath his cross.

II. It is for us to remember as we stand beneath the cross

Peter opens up his mouth and out comes one of Peter's classic "rocks." When he was good, he was good. When he was bad, he was bad. And sometimes Peter could say something really dumb. **"Let's build three**

tents.” He wanted so much to make this moment last. You can’t blame him for being excited. An elderly woman knew she was close to death. I had a devotion with her about seeing Jesus in heaven. She sighed with brightness in her eyes and said, “Just imagine! I will get to see him face to face!” Peter saw this. He saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus, and he wanted this moment to last.

Perhaps we should be more excited. Today we see the glory of God in the Word – as Peter reminded us in our epistle lesson for today. But do we get excited about seeing Jesus in God’s Word? I am really concerned about families in our church today. I’m not just concerned about those families who don’t come to church at all anymore. I am concerned about those families that think that coming every other Sunday is enough – or maybe once a month. Why are we not excited to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus?

Shame on us when we don’t get very excited about celebrating Good Friday! There was a day when all the businesses, even the banks and grocery stores, closed on Good Friday afternoon so we could come to the cross of Jesus. I know we can’t roll back the clock and change our culture. But why should this keep us from honoring our Jesus for the greatest single thing that has ever happened in the history of the world? Many churches have given up worship on Ascension Day. Some of even given up Christmas morning. Why? Because no one came. Will we give up on Good Friday, too?

Look at what you have seen today in the face of Jesus. You see the glory of God. When God appeared to Moses to show him his glory on the mountain, he hid him in the cleft of the rock and covered him with his hand. His glory would have been too much for Moses to bear. He would have died from the excitement of it. Ex. 33.22. On another mountain, God took Elijah for a little pep talk in his ministry. First there was a mighty wind, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. And God wasn’t in the fire, either. He came in a still small voice and Elijah pulled his cloak over his face.

You have seen more than what Moses saw, more than what Elijah saw, and even more than what the disciples saw on the mountain. You have seen God’s glory in this face (transfiguration) and even more so in this face (crucifixion). You have also seen the battered face of Jesus, the bloody and beaten face of Jesus. I don’t know if I could subject myself to such a beating for any one. My God became this for me! ‘I scarce can take it in!’ It causes me to “tremble, tremble, tremble.”

And do you know what? One day you will open your eyes in heaven, and you will see Jesus face to face, in all his glory as the eternal Son of God. You will see the marks in his hands and side, the proof of his love for you. I guarantee that you will be so excited on that day that you will open your mouth in shouts of praise and acclamation. And your voice will be lost amid the shouts and songs of all the saints before his throne. That moment will not pass, as it did for Peter and the disciples on the mountain.

So which face of Jesus would you like to hang on your wall? Perhaps you should hang them both, side by side, so that you can see the full glory of God in the face of Jesus. Amen.