

*Jesus Never Changes*

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Last Sunday after Epiphany

January 21, 2024

Matthew 17:1–9

The eternal triune God never changes. He does not go back and forth as we often do. He does not waver as we prone to. We can count on Him. He is a rock.

Jesus is God. He is fully divine along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And yet, Jesus changed. On the mountain His appearance was altered, He was transfigured. The three disciples there witnessing this had never seen anything like it.

Jesus is God but He also was a human being and so had gone through many changes in His life. As a baby, He continued to grow and He eventually lost His baby fat. The appearance of His face may have changed as a teenager as many of them are afflicted with acne. As an adult He looked very different from when He was a five-year-old boy. Jesus becoming a human being means that He changed, His appearance changed throughout His life.

Here on the mountain, though, this was different. This was a stunning display of His glory. Jesus' appearance turning radiant was displaying His glory. This was a glimpse of His true glory. This gives us a little taste of what we will experience in eternity.

Peter thought it would be great for them to hang out there forever. Glorious Jesus was far better than ordinary Jesus. After all, wasn't Jesus here showing them who He really was? Jesus is God and God never changes. What He looked like as an ordinary human being was not who He really was.

But this transfiguration on the mountain was for a brief moment. Jesus would show them this was not His true glory nor the true reason He came into this world. He would go through another transformation. His appearance would again be visibly changed. Isaiah 53 describes this very different transfiguration, saying that people were appalled at Him because "His appearance was so disfigured that He did not look like a man." He was put on trial and His opponents struck Him with blows. Being struck repeatedly with blows a person's face can become disfigured, with the skin around the eyes swelling up and the lips swelling up and gashes marking up the face. Jesus hung there on the cross with blood streaming down His face. He looked very different from not even twenty-four hours before.

Jesus is God and He never changes. This is the truth of the transfiguration of Jesus and of His suffering and death. His appearance changed, but He did not. He is a rock. He remains in His unchanging glory and grace and love toward us.

We are not this way at all. We are the ones who change. We know we shouldn't tell the dirty little secret someone has told us. But we'll just tell one person. We know we shouldn't cheat on our taxes, but we follow advice on a way we can skirt the law with the justification that the regulation in this instance isn't really fair. We know that we should spend more time reading the Bible, but we keep putting it off because we have so many responsibilities and should not let down others by taking time out for the Bible.

Maybe the excitement of your early years as a Christian is wearing off. You may be bored with the Bible or feel that what happens here in God's House is the same old thing and miss the true the glory that is found here in this place where Christ is actually present in His Word and in His Sacrament. Or as you are growing in your faith it is becoming more clear that some of your fellow Christians aren't quite living in the way they should be as followers of Christ and instead of the compassion you used to have for them as a fellow sinner struggling with sin you are now looking down on them.

Every parent has memories flooding back of the times they made promises to their children only to later break them. Everyone who is married feels the sting of times they have let down their spouse. Whether you are a friend or an employee or others depend on you, you find that you are not at all like God. You are not a rock. People can't always count on you.

We can count on Jesus. God the Father spoke on that mountain: "This My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him." Why should we listen to Jesus? Because Jesus never changes. He is reliable. He loves you. He will tell you things that are hard to hear. Stop sinning. Stop taking people for granted and actually listen to their concerns and actually care about them. He loves you enough to tell you to repent of your sins and to make great efforts to stop those sins you rationalize away.

He calls you to repentance because He wants to forgive you. And He does. He never changes. Week in and week out He will give you His body to eat and His blood to drink. Here at this altar we might well say with Peter, "Lord, it's good that we are here." There's no better place to be, no greater glory this side of heaven. This in fact is heaven come to earth, a glimpse of Jesus' brilliant glory. His appearance is different, looking just like bread and wine, but in fact He is giving you His very body and blood.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mountain, talking with Him, communing with Him in a sense. They will be here as well when at this altar we will be communing with them and the angels and the archangels and the whole company of heaven. This is the eternal unchanging feast Christ is celebrating even now in heaven and which He invites us to partake of. The Father said, "Listen to Him." He tells you, "Take, eat, this is My body, given for you. Take, drink, this is My blood, shed for you." Jesus will never change. He will keep loving you. He will keep inviting you to partake of Him and so you have the unchanging confidence that you are eternally bound up in Him in His eternal life. The Holy Communion we partake of is bound up in the eternal feast.

Even so, for us in this life, like it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, it lasts for a few moments. We don't hang around here at the altar. Jesus bids us come down to the plain and we go from here to live out our daily lives for yet another week. There will probably be changes in your life. You may be hit with some bad news. You may face yet another week adapting to changes you've already been going through. You may feel as though your faith is not all that strong, that it's not rock solid.

Jesus is. He will never change. He will go with you down to the plain, where you live out your life. He is with you and even in you, as He Himself has given Himself into you in His holy meal. The life He has given you in your Baptism and which He sustains you with in His sacred meal, this is eternal life, it will never change. You have life in Him forever. Amen.

SDG

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