IT'S GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE!

1. To catch a glimpse of Christ's glory
2. To listen to the word of God's Son
3. To prepare ourselves for the future

Have you ever made an extra effort to get to a particular location that you hoped would offer you a breathtaking view of spectacular scenery? Maybe you climbed to the top of Pike's Peak in Colorado or went out of your way to travel to the north rim of the Grand Canyon or portaged a canoe way back into the Boundary Waters. And the whole while, you are thinking: This better be worth it. I mean, this is a lot of work. I hope it pays off. And then you reach your destination and the view just takes your breath away! It is better than you ever imagined! And you think to yourself: Wow! What a spectacular view. What a great place to be. Boy it feels good to be here!

In God's Word today, we meet a group of men who experienced a very similar feeling. After climbing to the top of a mountain, they too witnessed a spectacular sight - something that took their breath away. And yet, the sentiments they expressed on the mountaintop are not that different than the ones we might well express today. In a sense, Peter speaks for all of us with the words: Lord, it's good for us to be here.

As we celebrate Jesus' Transfiguration today, we want to take a moment to draw a few parallels between the experience that Peter and the others enjoyed in the Lord's presence on the mountaintop and the experience you and I enjoy in the Lord's presence here today. In either case, Peter's words ring out with the truth: IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE. It is good to catch a glimpse of Christ's glory, to listen to the word of God's Son and to prepare ourselves for the future.

First, it is good for us to be here to get a glimpse of Christ's glory. Certainly, that was the case with the three disciples on the mountain. The first reason they had to say, It's good to be here was the view that Christ gave them of himself. Mark tells us that after Jesus led Peter, James and John up onto a high mountain, He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. In Luke's account, we are told: The appearance of his face changed and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Matthew says: His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light. Can you imagine? Suddenly standing a little ways from something as bright as lightning? If you are those disciples, aren't you saying: What is this? What is going on here? In fact, maybe that is still an appropriate question today. Yeah, what was going on there? Why was Jesus suddenly as bright as the sun?

To answer that, we need to remember who Jesus is. From before time began, Jesus has always been true God. Scripture says: In Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. That means that in his person, Jesus has all the glory of God. And yet, when Jesus became a man, that is, when he took on a human nature through his conception in the Virgin Mary, he set aside that glory. Or maybe a better way to say it would be that he covered up that glory. It was still his; you just could not see it.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, however, that all changed. There Jesus, in effect, lifted the veil. He allowed a portion of his divine glory to shine through. He gave his disciples a glimpse of his glorious holiness - and it practically blinded them!

Suddenly, it was very obvious that Jesus was not just any old Jewish rabbi. He was not some carpenter's son. He was not even merely a pretty good example of how God wants us
to live our lives. No, by his transfiguration, Jesus proved that he was and still is the all glorious Son of God.

But now someone might say: Wait. I wasn't there for this transfiguration. I didn't see his glory with my own eyes. How can I be sure that Jesus is God? You can be sure, because these eye-witnesses wrote it all down for your benefit. In his second epistle, Peter, who was there on the mountain with Jesus, writes: We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

My friends, Peter wrote those words for our benefit. Every time we gather here in God's house to read and study his Word, we get another glimpse of God's glory. When we read the accounts of Jesus healing the man born blind, or driving the demons, or stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, we're reminded that the one we called Jesus, was no mere mortal. He was and still is, God.

In a world that can seem so mundane at times, when our lives strike us as being so completely ordinary, so routine - shall I say it - so boring, let's not miss the fact that every week we have a chance to come and worship God! That's right, the all-powerful, all glorious, bright-as-the-sun, clothes-like-lightening, Son of God! What a reason to say: It is good to be here!

But it is not the only reason to be here, is it? Up on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples were not there only to see something. They were also there to hear something. So it is with you and me today. It is good for us to be here to listen to the word of God's Son.

After Jesus' glory was revealed, after Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke to Jesus, then told: A cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him. As God had done many times in the Old Testament, he made his presence known in the form of a cloud. Remember the cloud that surrounded the top of Mount Sinai when Moses received the Law? Or the cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness?

Here again, God speaks from a cloud and his words echo two previous statements he had made. One at Jesus' baptism when the Father said to Jesus: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. And the other occurred long before that when God spoke through Moses saying: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

You must listen to God's Son. Those words still apply to us today. It is the second reason for us to be here today, namely, to listen to what Jesus has to say to us. Again, in a world that seems to have an opinion on everything, what an advantage we have to let God's Son tell us the way things really are. Jesus gives it to us straight. Sometimes, his words cut us to the heart. For example, when Jesus says: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Or If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Or, For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

With words like these, Jesus tells us what he expects of us. He probes our inner thoughts and attitudes and reveals the ugly sin that lurks inside each of us. We are compelled to confess in the words of Luther: I am a sack of maggots. I have nothing worthwhile to offer God.
But then what does Jesus say? He says: The Son of Man did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. I am the Good Shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep. Come to me, you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven. Have there ever been more comforting words spoken than these? To hear Jesus, the very Son of God, tell you: I still love you. I gave my life for you. Dressed in my righteousness, you are all right with God.

My friends, isn’t that a message that we need to hear every day of our lives? A message that puts our hearts at peace? A message that Jesus offers us here in his Word? Isn’t that why we can say with Peter: Yes, it is good to be here?

Obviously, the disciples recognized that it was a good thing to be with Jesus up on the mountain. In fact, Peter was ready to build three shelters and just spend the rest of their days up there. But Jesus recognized that his mission was not yet accomplished. He had some major work to do yet. In fact, his transfiguration served to prepare him and his disciples for what was still to come. You might say the same thing is still true for you and me today. It is good for us to be here to prepare us for the future.

What did the future hold for the disciples? Well, shortly after this, the disciples would watch in disbelief as their teacher was taken into custody, condemned to die and then left hanging on a Roman cross. How could that not have a tremendous impact on the disciples? How could they not be thinking: Wait a minute, have we been putting our hopes in the wrong guy? Is this Jesus a fraud? Are we all doomed to a similar fate now?

Ultimately, those disciples would be able to look back on what they heard and saw on the mountain and say: No, we saw his glory. We heard the stamp of approval his Father gave him. Even though at the moment, we don’t fully comprehend what is happening, we can still trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Isn’t the same thing still true for you and me today? There are going to be some things in our lives that leave us saying: What’s going on here? I can’t believe this is happening to me. Why is this so hard? Why am I suffering so? I don’t understand.

It is at times like these that God invites us to think back to what we have seen and heard on this mountain. To remember that our loving Savior is still God. He is still in charge. Nothing is out of his control. But also to remember that God is also our loving Savior. He will rescue us from the ultimate penalty of our sin. And even though we may have to carry our cross in life, just as Jesus did, still God’s eternal glory will one day be ours. The same glory that Jesus displayed on the mountain will be ours, by grace, through faith.

Until that day comes - and in fact, in preparation for that day and all the days between now and then - there are few statements that are more true, more refreshing, more peace-full than the words: Lord, it is good for us to be here. Here to get a glimpse of your glory. Here to listen to the word of your Son. Here to prepare ourselves for whatever the future brings. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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