

“Something More Sure”

Ascending the mountain with Jesus – Peter, James and John might look at this man and see Him as any other man. He looks like the common man, One who could get lost in the crowds.

Then this man Jesus is transfigured before their very eyes – “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.” Moses and Elijah appear with Him – heavy hitters from the Old Testament who were more likely to draw attention than this Jesus fellow.

“Lord, it is good that we are here,” Peter says. How true. But God the Father breaks into this glorious mountain top experience, and declares – “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”

“Listen to Him” as you descend from this majestic glory – down the mountain and into some very dark days – to rejection, arrest, brutal beatings – to a cross and bloody death and a grave.” “Listen to Him.”

You have had your own dark days – and there are surely more to come. Like Peter, you would love to have Jesus appear in all His glory to lighten your life – for His Light to break into the darkness of your fears – to assure you of His presence with you, and love for you – so that you don’t have to face the darkness all alone.

When your spouse wanders – when your children are confused – when the doctor speaks in terminal language. Oh, how you would love an epiphany from the Lord – that He would appear to you – to give you something to hold onto – a comforting light when the darkness surrounds you.

In such dreary times you are especially vulnerable – vulnerable to the deceptions of the evil one – who would like nothing more than for you to fall into unbelief and despair. In times of weakness you are susceptible to all kinds of cleverly devised myths – promises of hope, recovery, salvation that are empty lies.

Glorious looking myths are tempting to hold onto – but they only draw you away from Christ who is your Light and your life. “Listen to Him,” your Father says.

It is good to listen to Peter as well – for he knows what it’s like to be in your shoes. This apostle of the Lord tells you today that you have “something more sure” – something greater to hold onto than the Transfigured Christ.

Peter – who had heard the preaching and teaching of Jesus – witnessed His miracles and His glorious transfiguration – would come down from that mountain, and in due time, would deny that he even knows this Jesus fellow.

Peter, who had boldly confessed Jesus “to be the Christ, the Son of the living God” – would find himself standing in the darkness, warming himself by a fire – while Christ the Light was being unjustly accused. In that darkness, when asked if he was a follower of Jesus, Peter changed his confession – “I do not know the man” – and off he runs into the darkness, away from Jesus, because he feared for his life.

Does that sound familiar? How often we vacillate between a bold confession of Jesus – and the darkness of fear and despair. Like Peter and the other disciples – we find ourselves in the darkness, locked behind doors of fear.

So, what happened to Peter? Why the change? How can he be so bold and confident in our Epistle reading for today? And at the end of his life – rather than deny Jesus as the Christ and run away – he confesses Jesus as his Lord, and suffers death (crucified upside-down on a cross according to tradition).

A lot happens to Peter after the Transfiguration – and after the suffering, crucifixion and death of Jesus. On the third day Jesus is raised to life again. He comes to Peter – and with his own eyes, he sees the resurrected Christ – and with his ears, he hears Jesus forgive all his sin, giving him peace.

Peter was an eyewitness of the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter receives the promised power from on high – the Holy Spirit – and by that Spirit, he “listens to Him.”

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter holds on to all of the words spoken by Jesus – and boldly confesses the faith, even unto death.

Peter is preserved from the darkness so that he might speak to you today – so that you may not fall away – so that you may hold onto Christ, even in the darkest of days. You are not directed to glorious signs and miracles – but to “something more sure” – “the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.” Or, as your heavenly Father would say – “listen to Him” – listen to Jesus.

Rather than “cleverly devised myths” or glorious mountaintop experiences – your Father has given you Jesus and His Word. As St. John writes in his Gospel: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” (St. John 20:30-31)

The Lord directs you to His Word in these last days – because the Holy Spirit is at work through His Word – as a Lamp in your dark places – enlightening you with Jesus, the Light of the world, the Light of life.

The Lord has gathered you here today – to the preaching of Christ’s Word and His Sacraments – not because they are grand and glorious, but because through these means God the Holy Spirit is at work “for you.”

“Lord, it is good that we are here” – so that the Holy Spirit filled Word may bring the light of Christ into your darkness. “Listen to Him.” Your sins are forgiven – you are made holy by my blood – and I assure you that I will come again, to resurrect your body, to live forever.

Jesus is with you on this mountain. “Listen to Him.” “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” He shepherds you through all your days, “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” – and then, when Jesus comes in all His glory, you will see Him face to face. This is most certainly true.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.