

There are Two Mountains

Matthew 17:1-9

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, February 10, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are two mountains. One is Mount Sinai. The other is the Mount of Transfiguration. These two mountains have important things in common. These two mountains have important differences.

Let us take the things that they have in common. Both mountains are mountains upon which God appeared. Both mountains are mountains upon which God appeared in a cloud. Both mountains are mountains upon which God spoke from the cloud when He appeared. Both mountains are mountains upon which Moses and Elijah appeared at the top. And both mountains are mountains upon which Moses and Elijah had direct person to person conversation with God. Both mountains generated terror in the hearts of those who witness the events that transpired on the top of the two mountains.

Now let us take the differences. On the top of Mount Sinai the Lord appears in darkness. The cloud is a thick darkness upon the top of the mountain. In addition to the darkness there was also a fire. On the Mount of Transfiguration the cloud is bright and illuminated. There is no darkness and no fire. God appears on the Mount of Transfiguration with His face shining like the sun. On the top of Mount Sinai the Trinitarian nature of God is not revealed. Moses and Elijah speak with Him separately. On the top of the Mount of Transfiguration the Trinitarian nature of God is revealed. God speaks because the Father and the Son speak and Moses and Elijah speak with the Father and the Son together.

And the chief difference between Mount Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration is the message that God speaks. On Mount Sinai out the darkness and gloom and fire God speaks His commandments. The commandments could be recited each one, but they are summarized neatly in the first commandment. He tells them, "You shall have no other gods." All of the other commandments are simply diagnostic tools to let us know when we have worshipped another god. If you misuse His name, it is because you worship something else. If you despise His Word, it is because you worship something else. If you dishonor your father or mother, murder, commit adultery or fornication, steal or cheat, lie, damage the reputation of another, or covet, it is because you fear, love, and trust in someone or something other than God. God spoke several pages worth of material to Moses from the top of Mount Sinai after the Ten Commandments further explicating them especially in their original context to Israel. But in the end His message is basic, "You shall have no other gods." He spoke this

message out of darkness and fire because darkness and fire are the elements of His judgment. Our Lord describes hell in numerous ways, but two of the ways that He describes hell is the outer darkness and the eternal fire. Our Lord then reveals something of the outer darkness and the eternal fire at Mount Sinai so that you may fear Him and not do anything against these commandments.

The Mount of Transfiguration is quite different. Here God reveals to us that He is the Father and the Son and later it will become clear Holy Spirit. There is no darkness here and no fire. Rather there is brilliant light. The message is also very simple. When the cloud appears and the disciples are terrified because they remember Mount Sinai, God the Father speaks to them and says, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."

This message would have made quite an impression on the disciples. If I were a disciple I would have paid close attention to these words. After all the disciples were so terrified just as Moses and Elijah were when they met God on the top of Mount Sinai that whatever God said would be permanently ground into their memories. "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." And just like Israel in the past it was easier for the disciples to keep the word of the Lord shortly after it was spoken than it would be it months or years later.

And so the disciples are at the top of their attention immediately after the Father tells them to listen to Jesus. And what does Jesus say in all of His glory with His face shining like the sun? He says, "Arise. Do not be afraid."

This is the Word of the Lord.

This is the Lord's glory. It is the glory of Sinai. It is the glory of transfiguration. It is the glory that the apostles have born witness to you now because now He is risen from the dead.

This is the Lord who is the judge of the living and the dead. This is the Lord who will appear in this glory when He returns on the final day. The apostles saw only a preview of His final glory. All humankind is destined to see the complete display of His glory on the final day. On that final day the Lord will display the glory of both mountains. He will display the glory of Mount Sinai. He will also display the glory of the Mountain of Transfiguration. The Lord is the judge of the living and the dead.

The Father judges no one because the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son He has entrusted all judgment to the Son because the Son is the Son of Man. And what our Lord says cryptically His apostles say more clearly. God has made Him the judge of the living and the dead. God has given evidence of this by raising Him from the dead.

And what are you going to tell the judge about how you have kept the commandment to have no other gods? What are you going to tell Him about all the ways you have had other gods which are diagnosed by His other commandments? It is not like you can escape Him. He judges the living and the dead. That is to say that the dead arise when He returns. You cannot escape Him by dying. You cannot escape Him by living. One way or the other you will stand before His judgment.

When you do there is no jury. There are no attorneys one way or the other. There will be no one there to argue your case for you. There will be no one there to look for loopholes in the commandments to get you off the hook. There are no higher courts than Him to which you may appeal. He is the end. He is the goal of all things. All will stand before Him for judgment and He will make the final decision. In plain terms with which you are familiar, He will decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. In biblical language He will decide who gets to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world and who is cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. There will be no appeals and no parole. His judgment is final and everlasting.

What are you going to say to Him? Are you going to try to excuse your sin? Are you going to give a list of godly reasons why you had other gods? Are you going to blame others for your sin? Are you going to blame your wife? It is her fault that you did what you did when you worshipped other gods? Are you going to blame your husband? Are you going to say that it was his fault and that his behavior incited you to love and fear other gods besides the one before whose judgment you stand? Can you possibly use the government as a defense on the final day? Can you say to Him, "Well, what I did was legal"? Do you think that the Lord of nations cares what the state of Illinois thinks is legal or not? Do you think that the Lord of glory with His shining face cares what the federal government of the United States thinks is right or wrong? Do you think that the Lord of heaven and earth is swayed by the majority of humanity and will go along with the majority in His judgment? Keep in mind this is the same humanity that fears, loves, and trusts in things other than Him which is precisely the basis of His judgment.

What is there to say when you face Him in the judgment? What is there to do, but to tremble in His presence like any rational person would do?

If there is hope for you in the final judgment it will be in the judge himself and in no one and nothing else. If there is hope for you to inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world, that hope will be in what the judge says.

The judge before whom you will stand on the final day is the lawgiver who gave the law at Mount Sinai and instructed Moses regarding His worship and His holiness in the tabernacle and in Israel's sacrifices.

The judge before whom you will stand is also the one who appeared in glory on the Mountain of Transfiguration. He is the One about whom the Father said, "Listen to Him."

The judge before whom you will stand is also the crucified One. When you stand before Him on the final day, observe His features carefully. Like Thomas before you, you will see the wounds in His hands and in His feet. You will be able to see the mark in His side from those who pierced Him.

And it is precisely because of those wounds that you have hope in the judgment. You have hope in His words. And when He returns again in glory, if you are in your graves you will hear the same word that He spoke to the disciples at the Mount of Transfiguration. And since the Father told the disciples in the bright cloud to listen to Jesus, then it is important that you consider these words, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.