

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

March 3, 2019

**Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann**

I want to begin with a story. There was a huge fire in a chemical plant recently. Fire trucks from all the surrounding communities responded. A crowd gathered. They stood at a distance watching the flames. The media was there—reporters, helicopters, TV vans with satellite dishes on top. The president of the chemical company was frantic. He stood in front of the cameras with the fire chiefs from all the engine companies. He pointed to the fire and said, “In the middle of that inferno is a fireproof safe filled with super-sensitive documents and the top-secret formulas for our latest and best-selling products.” Then he promised \$1 million to the fire department that brought the blaze under control and rescued the safe. The fire chiefs rallied their firemen and firewomen. They pulled out all the stops trying to get the fire under control, but it just wasn't happening. The fire continued to rage. After quite some time the crowd heard another siren in the distance that kept growing louder. Before long, this beat up old 1930's style fire truck came barreling into the parking filled with a bunch of guys in their 60's and 70's. The crowd parted and the firetruck didn't even slow down as it came roaring through the crowd, heading straight for the chemical plant. It burst through the doors of the plant and right into the middle of the blazing inferno. Everyone gasped just thinking about what these guys were doing. And thank God, before long the fire was under control. Before long this aged group of firefighters stumbled out of the building coughing and covered

with soot. Everyone cheered and clapped for their heroic effort. They saved the safe! A few hours later, in front of the TV cameras, the president of the company handed the 82-year-old fire chief a check for \$1 million. One reporter asked the chief what they planned to do with the incredible reward. The chief didn't even hesitate—"The guys already told me," he said. "They want to buy a new fire engine that has some brakes."

I tell you this story for two reasons. First, I thought it was kind of funny. But second, and more important, there is a lesson we need to learn here. Every story, every situation, every incident has two levels. On the first level, there are the facts of what happened—the who, what, where and when. These are the facts and the facts are pretty important. But there's another level, a second level, and that is why it happened. And the "why" is often more interesting than the "what."

Something unusual happened in our gospel lesson for today, but the why of it happening is even more exciting. Peter, James, and John went up on a mountaintop with Jesus. While they were up there two prophets from the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, appeared. They talked with Jesus and one of the things they talked about was the cross. Then a cloud came and a voice came from the cloud—"This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him." Then they went down the mountain and didn't tell anyone about the experience.

Peter, James, and John went up to the mountaintop and saw. But what did they see?—They saw the face of God. Up until this time Jesus had been their teacher. Now he was so much more. They could see—the God of heaven and earth had stepped into his own creation. He had become our brother. And the way before him led to Jerusalem and to the cross. The Prophet Isaiah called him "Immanuel", which means "God with us." In his suffering, in his crucifixion, in his death, this Jesus paid the price for the sins we do. He broke the power of death and hell forever. And he revealed himself in all his love and compassion and mercy and grace. It's Transfiguration Sunday, and when you look at Jesus on the

mountaintop what do you see? Not just a man who points the way—He is the God who is the Way. Not just a teacher who dropped in to teach us the truth—He is the God who is the Truth. Not just someone to tell me how to live a better life—He is the God who is the Life. Jesus said, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14:6)

When Peter, James, and John saw what they saw on the mountain and heard the voice of God, they wanted to stay there. I remember when my wife and I were out in California last summer. We stayed for a week at Point Arenas, north of San Francisco. It is a rugged coast and the views from the cliffs are amazing. But one day, as we were driving along Highway 1—the road twists and turns and the pavement goes right up to the edge—a storm blew in. Suddenly the ocean churned up. The wind and the rain were lashing the trees. I wanted to stay and drink in the beauty and power of nature. But we needed to get down off that cliff and back to some shelter.

Peter, James, and John wanted to stay in the glory. They wanted to stay on that mountaintop and worship. And I think, sometimes we Christians want to do the same thing. We want, we may even demand, the mountaintop experiences. We love the highs and we shun the lows. We may even start to think that if our lives are not just glorious, or if we’re not on a spiritual mountaintop all the time—then, maybe, there’s something wrong with us or with our faith or with God.

But Jesus didn’t see it that way. After the experience on the mountaintop, what did Jesus do? He went back down the mountain to face Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus knew—it’s good for all of us to have those mountaintop experiences, but the real work is in the valleys, in the depths of human sin and brokenness. And there on the cross, Jesus paid the price. He experienced the brutality of human brokenness—the despair—the grief—all the pain that comes along with living life. He experienced it all on the cross, for all of us. And through his resurrection on Easter morning, he

conquered it all, for all of us. Jesus went up the mountain to be transfigured. He came down the mountain to be our Savior.

Now, Jesus invites you to be in a relationship with him—to come down from the mountain and work with him in the valley—to experience the human condition and join in this ministry of love and compassion. He wants you to bring some of His grace into our world. He wants you to bring faith into the lives of the people around you.

I want to close with another story—this one is from Pastor Louis Valbracht’s book, *Exit Interstate 0*. “I remember the unchurched husband of a woman in a former congregation. He never came to church, but she was always there. She was a quiet, retiring woman who took part in everything, but always in the background, always silently. Oh, there were many people who talked to her husband urging church attendance and church membership. One day he finally came and eventually, he became a member of the congregation. Sometime later I had the occasion to ask him why? Who said the right thing to him? Who had finally convinced him? ‘No one,’ he answered. ‘It was my wife. She never said anything, but, I guess, over the years, she kind of lived me into it.’”

She kind of lived me into it. That’s the work of the valley—living the way Jesus wants us to live.