

Text: Matthew 17:1-9.

Transfiguration.

February 26, 2017.

Grace and peace are yours through our glorious Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Life has highs and lows. We could all agree to that, right? Got married! Whoo hoo! Had a baby! Congratulations! Got hired! Cool! Got valedictorian! Way to go! Those highs can quickly become lows. He doesn't look as good in the morning as he did on a date. She's never going to sleep through the night. This new job is a lot of work. I'm really tired. The other kids made fun of me for being Mr. smarty pants. You can't win, right? That's our life. Highs and lows.

It was the same for Peter, one of Jesus' closest followers and a key guy in this part of the Bible. Peter just had a great high. Jesus asked him, "Who do you say I am?" Peter rose above the popular opinion. Peter didn't care what other people said or thought. Peter boldly confessed, "Jesus, you are the Christ! The Son of the Living God!" Cool! Then Jesus went on to tell Peter, "This is what being the Christ means. I will have to suffer and die." Then Peter hit his lowest low. Peter told Jesus, "No way, Lord! Never! This will never, ever happen to you!" Jesus' response? "Peter, you are Satan himself." Ouch! What a low. But let's face it. We think like Peter. We think life for the Christian should be all highs. Peter thought life for the Christ should be all highs.

Was it that way for Christ? Was it all highs in his life? No! Not at all! Jesus experienced the lows of temptation, in a desert, with no food. Jesus experienced the high of popularity and then an instant low as thousands of people abandoned him. In one day! Then there was the beating and the spitting and the whipping and the mocking. And the 12 guys who followed him around for three years, and even this Peter, who said, "I will never disown you"? They all ran away at the first sign of trouble. They left Jesus to die. Pretty much alone. We are going to walk with Jesus over the next six weeks through this lowest low we call Lent. We will see again in detail his suffering and death. But before we walk through that lowest low, Jesus will give us this high, this amazing glimpse of his glory, this Transfiguration, this perfect sight for us to see.

Man! What a sight that was. And Jesus only let three see, and we see. Maybe you have to close your eyes. Maybe you have to put on your imagination cap. But see it, feel it, experience it. Jesus was transfigured. His appearance, his face, his clothes, his just totally changed, like a caterpillar to a butterfly. His face shining like the sun itself. Picture that! Imagine that! His clothes as white as the light. Now we see white all the time, especially when snow covers everything. But this is a desert. Before washing machines and Tide. Nothing's really ever clean by our standards. Nothing's really ever white. And his clothes weren't just clean white like towels at a decent hotel. They were shining white, like the little glistening ding from the teeth in the toothpaste commercial. Can you really see it? Would you ever forget? This was a once in a lifetime, a once in forever. Peter and John both referred to this incident as proof that Jesus is one to worship, the one to follow, the one to stick with through highs and lows because only Jesus has glory this high.

Oh, and wait! It gets even better. The Greek saved the behold for verse three. Just then! Look! Behold! There's Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Just talkin' it up, having a casual chat, like they had a little coffee in hand. It's Moses and Elijah for crying out loud. Moses was the greatest prophet of all time. God spoke to Moses face to face. Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Literally! Elijah was a great miracle worker. He stopped it from raining for 3 and a half years to show God's power over false fertility gods. Elijah called down fire from heaven to destroy God's enemies. More than once. And it came! And here these two guys are, standing there, talking with Jesus! What a high, man! Sorry, they weren't smoking anything. But this had to be a greater high than anything else.

Moses and Elijah! There. In the flesh! Elijah didn't die. He was taken body and soul into heaven. Moses died, but the Bible seems to indicate that God took Moses' body to heaven after his death. Remember that Jesus was a man, who experienced hunger and thirst and sadness and pain. And Jesus was a man who knew what was coming, sadness beyond belief, pain unlike anyone else had ever suffered, gruesome death. Jesus needed this high to see him through the low that was coming. Jesus needed this encouragement. So they talked about it. This account in Matthew just tells us they were talking. The Bible book of Luke tells us, "They spoke about his departure," his suffering and death, which Jesus was about to undergo.

The Transfiguration was a high for Jesus to see him through the upcoming lows. The Transfiguration was a high for Peter, James and John, one they never forgot, to see them through the lows. The Transfiguration is a high for us to see, to see us through the lows.

But let's face it. We would like to keep riding the high and stay on top forever and never have to come down. Peter felt the same. I can't blame him. Can you imagine yourself standing there, seeing this beyond awesome glimpse of glory, seeing Moses and Elijah, your two great heroes. Wouldn't you want to stay? Peter wanted to stay! Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you will please allow me to, I can put up three shelters, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah and we can just stay. Now, Peter was on to something. It was good for them to be there. And he was offering to do a good work for Jesus. But this was a time for adoration, not action. This was a time for worship, not work.

And good as it was for them to be there, there were some problems with Peter's line of thinking. For one, he just blurted something out. He didn't know what he was saying. That never happens to us. And Peter wanted to really bring heaven down to earth. You can't do that. You can't bring heaven down to earth. You have to let God lift you up to heaven. Notice, too, how Peter was putting Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the same plane. Peter, in trying to hang onto this situation, was really bringing Jesus down a notch. And good as it was for them to be there, they couldn't stay. They had work to do on the plain. There was a sick boy and troubled father wavering between faith and unbelief who needed Jesus. Peter didn't want to get dirty doing messy work on the plain. Peter didn't want to see another low. Peter wanted only highs, up on the mountain.

Well, God spoke before Peter could go any further or put any plans into action. Wait. We aren't done yet? Jesus transfigured? Moses and Elijah? And now God the Father himself! Yes! God's own voice. And interesting, a bright cloud covered them. When God covered another mountain, Sinai, to give his law, God came down in a dark cloud. But here, when God covers this mountain, to give his Gospel, he comes down in a bright cloud. This is a cloud of his love and glory. God points to Jesus. This is my Son, whom I love. Sounds like the exact same words God the Father spoke at the baptism of Jesus. But now God adds something, "Listen to him!" Listen to him! He's going to say some pretty unpopular stuff, stuff you won't want to hear, won't want to believe. He's going to tell you again about his suffering and death. Listen to him! Pay attention. He's my Son. I'm speaking through him. Listen to him in the highs. Listen to him in the lows. Listen to him!

I don't know how much listening Peter, James and John were doing. They were too busy falling on their faces in fear, a great fear, an exceedingly great fear. But what would you do if God's voice boomed from heaven, if the voice of the Holy One himself rang from the ceiling and shook the floor! We're sinners. God is holy! We can't stand in his presence. We can't get close to him! And we certainly don't want to listen to him. "Yeah, Jesus is cool. He's all love and forgiveness and peace. I'll listen to that. But when God says only one man and one woman should have sex and only after they are married and only to each other? Come on, God, did you write that with a chisel in a rock? God, I'm a Christian. That means

my life is going to be easy and happy and healthy. God, did you really say, 'whoever wants to live a godly life with Jesus will be persecuted?' That's not the God I want to listen to! That's not my God." You can't just listen to God when it's convenient. You can't just follow Jesus for the highs. But that's what our sin wants us to do.

Jesus came to suffer the lows for you. Jesus came from the highest heaven to the lowest cradle, in a cave. Jesus went from that cave to a cross. There on the cross, Jesus went through the lowest low of all, for you. Hell. That's right. Jesus went through hell itself, separated from God, so you won't ever have to be separated from God. Let me say that again. Jesus went through hell itself, so you won't ever have to. Jesus went through the lowest low, to lift you up to the highest heights of high: heaven. At what looked like his lowest moment, Jesus' dead body was placed in a cave. But Jesus' body didn't stay there in that lowly place. Jesus lifted his body up, alive, to the highest heaven, ascended and living and ruling forever and ever. And Jesus will lift your body from your grave. What seems like the lowest day, your death, will be your highest day, your heavenly day, the day you get to go and be with Jesus where there will be no lows, no more. None at all. Jesus touched Peter, James and John to lift up their eyes to see only him. Jesus touches us with his own body and blood, to put on our eyes of faith to see him blessing us with highs and blessing us even more with lows, lows that remind us how much better it will be in heaven, lows that knock us down so we look up to him. Focus on Jesus. He's the only one to stick with us in the lowest lows and he's the only one to give us the highest highs.

There's one more thing for us to talk about in this part of God's Word. After this great high, Jesus instructed these three guys, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until after I have been raised from the dead." Why would he say that? Why not have them go out and tell? Well, for one, they didn't understand the meaning of this transfiguration, so how could they explain something they didn't understand? This was only one piece of the puzzle in Jesus' glory and Jesus wanted them to wait until they had all the pieces and had seen the greater glory of his resurrection. But there's something even more important. Jesus wanted them to focus on his Word, not their sight. God said, "Listen to him!" Jesus wanted them to listen to him, not only need to see him. Jesus wanted them to rely on faith, not on sight, because they wouldn't have the sight very much longer. But they would always have faith. They would always have God's Word.

I know you wish you could have been there for this greatest high, seeing Jesus' glory, talking with Moses and Elijah, hearing God's own voice. Man, if I had been there, I would always be on a high. But God has given us the same tools they had to see them through the lows. We have God's Word. Listen to it. It's how God sticks with you through the lows. You have faith, which is better than sight. Faith sees God's good purpose, even when sight can't see it, even in the lowest lows. God will always stick with you through the highs and lows. Amen.