

“I don’t like my cross” Mark 9:2-9

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

Today we celebrate our harvest festival. We give thanks to the Lord for all the gifts that He continually gives to us. And I guess, living here, in a country we can see His hand at work much clearer than living in big cities.

We can praise the Lord together with Psalmist saying:

“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.
The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” (Ps 145:13-16)

By the way, Luther used exactly these words together with Table Grace. And we can join to Him praising our Lord for every blessing He has granted to us. As a loving father cares for his beloved children, thus your Father in heaven cares for you, for each of you.

But our today Gospel reading is not about harvest or God’s gifts in creation, but about Transfiguration. Transfiguration means simply a changing of appearance. And the one whose appearance was changed before the eyes of His disciples was Jesus.

Let’s see how we can understand this event and what we can learn from it. “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.”

This is what we can see and read throughout the Bible. True God dwells in inapproachable light. Whenever God reveals Himself there is this imagery of fire and

bright light. Something that is powerfully destructive, and at the same time indescribably beautiful and attractive.

We can see both of these aspects revealed also in this event. Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of His closest disciples and they saw at least a little glimpse of Jesus divine glory.

“And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.” Elijah and Moses. Why Elijah and Moses? Why not somebody else? Quite certainly was a reason why they.

This is how the Church has understood it. They both are mentioned in the last few verses of the Old Testament. In the book of Malachi. Moses was the one through whom the Old Covenant was made.

Elijah was the one who had to come before the day of the Lord. Now, as Jesus Himself had proclaimed, the time was fulfilled. The Kingdom of God was at hand. There was a time to make a new covenant. Everlasting covenant.

So the presence of Moses and Elijah indicated that a new age has dawned. The Kingdom of God was at hand, in fact, it was in their midst, for the King of Kings Himself was present. As He is with us today.

There is something else... there were Elijah and Moses. They were long gone from this world. Moses had passed away 15 hundred years ago, Elijah 10 hundred year ago. But now we can see that they were there.

The same Elijah and the same Moses. Appearing in their glorified new bodies. This was not only a glimpse for the disciples, but through their written testimony this is a glimpse of what expects for all of us.

New glorious bodies, without sin, without pain, without death, as good as we can possible be as God's creatures. And we'll still be we. You will be you. Glorified. Indescribably beautiful. And we'll see Jesus.

Exactly as the apostle John wrote: “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1Jo 3:2)

And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

We may wonder, what was wrong with Peter. He could never keep His mouth shut, and whenever he spoke from his heart, he got it wrong. It is interesting to see what was the disciples' reaction. Yes, Peter was the one who spoke, but it seems that they all shared the same experiences.

First think which is interesting to notice - how did Peter call Jesus? Rabbi. Only six days earlier that was Peter who spoke led by the Holy Spirit and confessed that Jesus was indeed God's Christ, God's chosen Saviour of humanity, the Lord of Lords.

Now... rabbi... What was wrong with you, Peter? They still hadn't got who Jesus was. Someone very special, yes, but who exactly? Thus the best that Peter could do was 'it is good that we are here, let us make tents' ... for they were terrified.

Here we can see what was mentioned already earlier. Indescribably beauty and terrifying power on God's glory. Let me ask you. When you are terrified from something you see or experience, what do you want to do?

You say to yourself 'this is a nice place, I want to stay here'. Right, this is what we say. No, we want to run as far away as possible. But Peter said, this is good, let's stay, for they were terrified.

God's Kingdom, this new heaven and earth, even when they saw only a glimpse of it was so beautiful that they didn't want to leave. But at the same time they were terrified from God's presence, for what happens when you are in God's presence?

Yes, when we are in God's presence, our impurity, our sinfulness, our uncleanness, ugliness of our thoughts and desires is revealed. True, we could die out of shame, terrified from what we deserve... but at the same time, this is the best place to be.

There is such a beauty, attraction, peace that you want to stay there. See, when we think about what the disciples experienced, this is not simply reflecting of what happened then and there.

We have similar experiences. Where? Here, in the Divine Service. For this is a place where we are on a mountaintop, in Jesus presence, where He comes to be among us and to bless us.

Yes, this is a place where our sins are revealed. For when we hear what God's will for our lives is, we see right away how far we are from living that way. Our hearts will desire anything, but what God desires us to be.

When we hear God speaking through your pastor, there are very uncomfortable moments. Have you loved your God from all your heart, have you called upon Him in day's good and bad, have you expected everything good from Him...

... have you accepted everything bad without complains, have you trusted Him as you Father, have you sought His presence, and have you done you best to do His will? If you haven't, then you deserve His wrath.

That would be just and fair. This is why we should be terrified in God's presence. And these were only a few question, we could talk about how willing we are to listen to our God, how willing we are to serve our neighbours...

... how well we are doing in regards to questions of sexual purity, how generous we are with what is entrusted to us, how well do we speak about others, how often we try elevate ourselves, by putting others down, and so on... we have to be terrified.

But on the other hand. This is the place, where God comes to you and tells how much He loves you. Yes, you, even if none of us deserves it. He still does it. He loves you so much that He is ready to give up His live so that you could live.

There is no greater love that Jesus love towards you. And the most beautiful thing is, He knows you, He knows your heart, all about you, better than you know yourself, and knowing all of this, He desires to be with you.

This is why we want to stay in God's presence even if it reveals who we truly are. Once you have truly experienced God's love, and I mean, once the Holy Spirit has assured you about how precious you are to Jesus and to the Father, there is nothing more desirable, neither here, nor in the world to come.

If the Holy Spirit has assured us of this love divine, we want to stay in His presence, we want to keep hearing Jesus words: "I love you my child, I have forgiven you all what you have done wrong, I want you to be with me."

This is how we can understand what happened to the disciples, but also to understand what happens with us, when God's love is poured over us. If someone loves you so much, and wants to give you so much, why would you want to leave?

And this is where we have a problem. The disciples had it as well. They were not meant to stay there. And we are not meant to stay here, in God's loving presence. "And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

What does this mean? It means that Jesus was the one of whom Moses spoke long ago: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you [...] it is to him you shall listen [...] And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." (Deut. 18:15-19)

This is the One, to Him you shall listen. But, to listen what? The disciples wanted to stay and enjoy God's glory. Even is just a few days ago Jesus had said them: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake band the gospel's will save it." (Mar 8:34-35)

I don't know about you, but I know about myself. I don't want to carry Jesus cross. I want to build a tent and to stay in His presence. It means, I really don't want to deal with the problems of this world, when I can enjoy Jesus presence.

I don't want to fight with my children teaching them one and the same thing 1000 times, I don't want to get over my pride trying to approach someone who doesn't want to hear the most important news.

I want to have ideal family and relatives when everything is perfect. I want ideal health. I want to have ideal congregation where everyone is passionate about listening to Christ, following Him and bringing others to Him.

I want to live in the world, where there are only nice, smart and honest people. I want to make a tent in God's presence and not to leave it. I don't know about you, but I am frustrated about so many things which I see going wrong, I don't want it.

When we leave the Divine Service, we return back to our daily lives with our problems, with our crosses to carry. Why can't we stay here?! Because this is not what we are called to do.

We are called to go as Jesus went, live for others, even if they fight against your help, care for them, pray for them, bring them closer to Jesus. This is what we are called to do. And it is not easy, it is no. That's why it's called 'carrying your cross'.

"And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only." But Jesus only... This is where we are. When we leave the glorious presence of God, the Divine service, we leave our little haven, we seem to be alone in this world again.

But we are not alone. You are not alone. Jesus is with you as He was with His disciples. Always. When you go back to do what you have to do, to carry your cross, Jesus is with you. Your God, who has prepared for you these new heaven and new earth, He is with you.

This is what gives you strengths. You can be sure, whatever happens here, whatever hard it is in this life, you have this glorious future prepared for you. In restored creation, in God's own presence, seeing Him face to face.

This is why we have these testimonies. So that we are not afraid. So that we know that when we carry our crosses, we do it together with Jesus. With the same Jesus who knows you, and who have promised to return for you.

Who has prepared for you a permanent place in His Kingdom, and you won't have to leave it anymore. You will be there forever. But for now here, right here is your mountaintop.

Here is the place where we can dwell in Jesus presence, here is the place where His glory is revealed to us. This is where Jesus strengthens us and speaks to us the words of His love, revealing what is He going to do for you.

Amen.