

## “This will happen with you too” 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 heard how Peter the apostle described what he and the two others, John and James, witnessed with their own eyes, namely, – how Jesus was changed, how Moses and Elijah appeared with Him discussing His sufferings and death, and how the voice of the Father was heard from above saying the key words: “This is my beloved Son; listen to Him!”

In many ways we are very much like Peter and the others. We have similar longings. We have similar thinking. We are human. Fallen human, to be precise. And we too need to hear these words again and again. Listen to Him!

Let’s take a look at what was going on on that mountain top, and how does that event help us to reflect on our Christian lives? Jesus was transformed. Nothing is said about how did it happen. We are only told what the result was.

Jesus’ “clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.” “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.” Have you ever seen something so beautiful that it takes your breath away?

That you can’t take your eyes away and you are filled with awe gazing at that beauty; it feels like you would want with your whole being be united, to merge with this beauty, to become one, but we can only gaze at it as our longings remain unsatisfied.

Peter, John and James saw sometime much more beautiful than we have ever seen. Besides, it wasn’t just beauty in general. It was Jesus, the most loving, the most wonderful being they had ever met, now also incredibly, indescribably beautiful, shining like the sun.

When you are having such an experience you don’t want it to end. We can relate to what Peter said. “It is good here. Let’s stay here.” In fact, we may have similar experiences, even if not so dramatic and powerful and this one.

When you come from the world, which is often hostile, demanding, exhausting, arrogant, unjust, deceiving, selfish, empty, foolish, sometimes even evil, and when you come into Christian fellowship in a congregation, among brothers and

sisters in Christ, who despite our imperfections try their best to show God's love to you, what a change it is! Thus, you may find yourself surrounded by people whose love and care for you makes all the difference in the world.

You may find yourself sitting at Jesus feet and listening as He speaks to you, as He reveals His love and tells about things that He has prepared for you. And all that give us a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is like.

And too often we have the same desire as the apostles had. "It is good hear. Let's stay here." We are called to love and to care for one another, and when by God's grace we succeed, the Church becomes the place where we can experience Jesus' presence, and we may not want to leave that place.

Neither did the apostles. But then, that voice... "Listen to Him!" ... changed their plans. Listen to Jesus, the Son of God. What does this mean? We could say that it means at least three things and they all are very important for us.

First. Listen to Him! To Him! Who has received all authority in heaven and on earth? That's right, Jesus has. We as Lutherans have even formalized this listening to Jesus. We have written it in our confession, and in our constitutions that we are first and foremost to listen to Jesus, to the Word of God.

And it is not simply about listening, it is about listening that leads to obeying. Both in ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek those two words 'listen' and 'obey' come from the same root. To listen means to obey.

It means, that He, the Word of God, is our highest authority and norm when it comes to matters of our faith and life. That is, when it comes to what we believe and how we lead our lives.

Formally it is so. But do we listen to Him? Do we obey? Do we live accordingly? Do we listen to Him more than to other authorities? Do we listen to Jesus or to the world around us?

Here we come to the second meaning of the command "listen to Him!" To listen Jesus in the sense of obey, we first need to ... listen to Him. Literary. It is much harder to listen to Jesus that it is to listen to the world around us.

You know how hard it is to open your Bible and to read it. And to do it regularly. There is always something more important, more urgent, more interesting.

Or how hard it is to come to Bible studies. Everything seems to prevent us from doing that. And we can easily make a long list of excuses why we don't have to do it.

And how easy it is to turn on TV, or radio, or Internet, or grab the newest novel, and the world speaks to you, teaches you, persuades you, shames you when you dare to disagree. No efforts needed.

Have you counted how many hours per week you listen to Jesus, and how many hours to the world? How can we listen to Him and obey, if we don't even listen to Him, if we even don't know what He says to us?!

Then there is the third meaning of this command of the Father. When He said these words to Peter and the two brothers, He didn't simply say them in some general sense. There was a particular lesson that Jesus was trying to teach them, and they just didn't want to listen. Just like us.

What was that lesson? We can read what Jesus was teaching right before this event. "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 and the gospel's will save it. [...]

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Yes, these unpleasant words. If you want to be with Jesus, if you want to be a Christian, then – deny yourself, take your cross and follow Jesus. For if you will be ashamed of Him, if you will be ashamed of being Jesus' disciple in this life, He will be ashamed of you, when He returns in His glory.

It doesn't get more counter cultural than that. Deny yourself! What? How do you dare to say something like that? Isn't everything in this world about me? We are born with this conviction. No one needs to convince us of it.

Have you met many people in your life who from their childhood without teaching have been mostly concerned with the needs of others, to such extent that you would need to say, – stop, slow down, think about yourself a little bit!

No one needs to tell us, 'think more about yourself', we are born masters of this fine art. And still, on top of that, the world keeps enforcing this "think first about yourself" through education, through media, everywhere.

And we as Christians are in no way immune to this problem. How often it is me first, then Jesus. My desires first, then the Church. My wants first, then the Gospel. We all are guilty of this...

The apostles initially didn't want to deny themselves but wanted to stay where it was good and comfortable. The same way we don't want to deny ourselves, but care for what we want and like first, and choose to be where we feel good.

But, there is a problem. The voice from above. Listen to Him! There is no new life, unless you die to your old self. There is no resurrection, unless you crucify your selfish desires. There is no glory and beauty with your Lord Jesus, unless you take your cross and follow Him.

The apostles didn't like that though. They wanted to jump straight into God's presence. To stay where it felt good. The same is so often true with us. Then we need to hear the awe-inspiring voice from above: "Listen to Him!"

The whole deny yourself, take your cross and follow me thing is quite simple. God has put each of us in our unique situation. He has put certain people in our lives and entrusted to care for them, and to tell them what God has done for them in Jesus.

Sometimes these are not nice people. Sometimes it is hard to serve them. Sometimes they are hostile and arrogant people, and it is very hard to tell them about Jesus. These are our crosses.

Different for each of us. But there is no glory without the cross. There is no following Jesus if we put ourselves first. For how do then we resemble Him? How do then we witness about Him, if we are no different than this world?

It may appear that to be a Christian is a hard calling. It may appear so. If we forget the reason why we follow Jesus. It changes everything. Jesus showed the reason to His three disciples on that mountaintop.

Remember, Jesus was transformed. There was such an overwhelming beauty that was without analogies in this world. Jesus showed us a glimpse of what is to come. He showed the reason why we follow Him.

So that we could be with Him forever. He was the firstborn of the new creation. But He has promised that we all will be transformed and receive new resurrected bodies. Paul the apostle was so excited about what is to come:

"We are God's children, – and heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul had seen it as well.

Elsewhere he writes: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body." (Phi 3:20-21) Did you hear that?

John, who witnessed Jesus' transfiguration, sends us these words of encouragement: "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." (1John 3:2)

This is the reason, the hope that enables us to deny ourselves, and take our crosses and follow Jesus, and we can do it with joyful hearts. For we know what awaits those who are not ashamed of Jesus. We know that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

We will see Jesus in His glory as He is. Sure. Besides, and this is even more impressive, we will be like Him. In new, glorified bodies, more beautiful than we dare to dream. We will be with this beautiful and all-powerful Jesus in New Heavens and New Earth and that reality will have no end.

It will happen with you too. This is, why it is so good that the Father keeps speaking to us: “Listen to Him, He is my beloved Son.” We need these reminders, we need this encouragement, we need all the help that is available to remain faithful till the end.

So far we have been blessed, for we have been able to listen to God’s Word preached, and to listen to it taught, and to read and discuss it at our homes. And the Holy Spirit Himself works with us changing our hearts and making us more like Jesus, so that we are not ashamed of the Gospel.

And by God’s grace, when Jesus returns, He won’t be ashamed of us either, and we will receive the glory that He has promised to those who love Him. Amen.