

“Shall we misuse them?” Matthew 17:1-9

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Do you like to be a member of Christ’s Church? Do you like to be among fellow saints in the Father’s house, among God’s own people? Most would answer with: “Of course, we do! Why else would we be here? What kind of questions is that, Pastor?!”

This is a blessed place to be. God’s very presence. It is different from any other place, any other setting. This is where the Triune God Himself invites us to be, so that He can be among us and bless us with His divine gifts.

This is where you are welcomed, accepted, cared for. This is where others understand you, you share the same faith, the same joy of belonging to the greatest and the most wonderful community that there is, the Church, of being Jesus’ own.

This is where you receive God’s unique gifts. Gifts which we can’t receive anywhere else. Here He Himself forgives you all your sins. “I forgive you!” Here He grants you freedom from all your idols: “You are free!”

Here He gives you abundance of His Holy Spirit until it overflows. Here the Lord Jesus invites you to partake in His Holy Meal: “Come and receive the medicine of eternal life!” Here we experience God’s love, and grace and appreciation, all of that - unconditional.

There is no other place like the Body of Christ. That is as close as we get to the same experience that Peter and the sons of Zebedee had on that mountain top two millennia ago. We like this. It is good here. That is true. We may want to stay here.

Sure, all those are good things. But... What do we often do with good things? Misuse, use them selfishly. Effortlessly. Just think about that event on the mountaintop. What happened? When Jesus was transformed, when for a little while He revealed His divine glory, when Moses and Elijah appeared, and it was so good, so, so good.

How did Peter react? “**Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here.**” “Peter! Really? Again, you are thinking only from your own perspective.” I guess that we can at least to some extent relate to what Peter experiences. You may have had similar experiences, maybe you have heard it from others.

When for a moment, being in Jesus’ presence, He gives you a glimpse of how good it could be. And the intensity of that goodness surpasses anything else you have ever felt in this life. At that moment it feels like you could exchange your entire life just to remain there. A bit longer...

Peter still had his wife. Commitments. Other disciples were still waiting for them at the foot of the mountain. Even more seriously, Jesus had set the course to Jerusalem, where He was about to “**suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.**” [Matt 16:21]

But who cares, right?! Why go back to the world full of challenges and trials?! It is so good here. Let’s make a bunch of tents and stay there! For it is so good. Really, Peter?! Not again! And we are not that different.

When we experience that the Lord is good, that it is so good to be among His people, in His house, we may be tempted to stay. To leave all the afflictions and daunting commitments behind. To remain in this safe haven. To forget about everything...

But then, “**a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”**” And when the disciples heard this, they were knocked down on the ground with fear and trembling.

The same voice still speaks to us today. “**Listen to Him!**” That is not an invitation: “You are welcome to listen to Jesus.” No! And that is not a suggestion: “It might be a good idea to listen to Jesus!” No! This is imperative, command.

The Father’s voice: “You! Listen to Jesus!” But... we may wonder. Listen to what? Up to that moment Jesus hadn’t said anything. Listen to what? The closest are the words of Jesus which He said right before this event on the mountaintop. The words which are meant for all His disciples, for each one of you.

“**Listen to Him!**” “**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 will find it.**” [Matt 16:24-25] Aha!

If you want to follow Jesus, you must deny yourself and to take up your cross. In other words, we can’t stay here, in this place of peace and rest, support and encouragement, of joy and hope. We can’t stay isolated from the world which we are called to serve.

It is good here. Yes. Sure. But once we have tasted that goodness, we must leave. We must go back to where the Lord Jesus sends us. Where is it? To all the challenges of this world. To all our trying responsibilities. To our families. To our extended families. To our circle of friends. To our workplaces. To our communities.

As we reflected last week, we are to go there to be the salt and the light of the world. Because you are set free and equipped for extraordinary service to all people in your lives. Yes, you are! You have God's wisdom in His Word to guide you, to help you to discern what service is truly a blessing and what is not.

You have God's Spirit to make your hearts burn in compassion and care for those around you, and you have the words of eternal life, the Gospel of Christ, the message of God's forgiveness and love on your lips to share with everyone. You are sent!

Of course, it is not easy. Especially when we want to serve our fellows according to God's own instructions, people may not welcome that kind of service, they may expect from us what their sinful hearts desire. "Give me what I want!"

They may not want to hear the Great News about Jesus, most often they don't, for they are still enemies of God, hostile to Him, until the Spirit, through your truthful and winsome speaking, gives them a new birth as children of God.

None of that is easy. Our frustration and hesitation are easy to understand. Neither we are ready nor equipped for those tasks on our own. This is why the Lord has blessed you with this community of saints, the body of Christ, your congregation.

Together we learn, together we study the Word in our Services and Bible studies, in our Christian conversations after the Service, or when we meet during the week, when we are there to support one another.

But in this age, in this life we can't stay in the Lord's presence forever. Whatever good it may feel. We must take our crosses and follow Him into this not so welcoming world. To deny ourselves, to be living sacrifices, to serve others, to witness.

And as we do so, the promise of God shines light on our path. Remember how Paul the apostle wrote in his letter to Romans: "**We are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**" [Rom 8:16-17]

Provided we suffer with Him... whatever we may need to suffer because of our trust in allegiance to Jesus and because of our obedience to His commands. Rejection, reviling, ruined relationships, limited opportunities, heartaches; all are waiting for God's faithful. There are many testimonies in the gospel accounts of how often and how badly Peter got it wrong. But eventually, he did listen to Jesus, and the Spirit changed him. Listen to a few excerpts from Peter's letter. He speaks like a different person.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” [1 Peter 4:12-14] “For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly... [...] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” [1 Peter 2:19-21] “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” [1 Peter 3:14]

When you get home, read 1st letter of Peter. So encouraging. That’s the same Peter. But also, he is so different. Similarly, the Holy Spirit gradually changes us. If you listen to Jesus, He will guide you, if you follow Him, He will never abandon you, if you share in His sufferings as you strive to serve and witness, you will share His glory. For sure!

And how amazing, how glorious that will be! We have no idea!

Peter and the sons of Zedebee, they only got a glimpse on that mountain top. But even then, they were ready to forget their lives and everyone in them just for that blessed experience to continue. How good it was up there!

Paul the apostle was shown as a bit more of what awaits God’s faithful and he states this repeatedly: “[Brothers, Sisters] **I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” [Rom 8:18]** “**For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” [2 Cor 4:17]** Let this sink in...

What shall we take with us from today’s mediations? Surely, rejoice in God’s abundant gifts that He showers you with here, in His house, amid His people. There is no other place under the Sun like this. It is so good to be here. It is. Rejoice, and be glad!

But... in this age, in this life we can’t stay in the Lord’s house forever. Let’s not misuse His gifts, let’s use them properly - to nourish our faith, to build us up for the tasks entrusted to us. Don’t let the sweetness of God’s gifts make you forget your path of following Jesus. “Listen to Him!”

Listen to Jesus carefully, more, seek for every opportunity to listen to Him. And then take up your crosses joyfully and follow Him. And one day, sometimes soon, you will see your Lord Jesus as He is in His glory, clearer than Peter and James and John saw. And not only that, but you will also be made like Him, and you will share in His glory rejoicing forever with joy inexpressible. This is most certainly true.

Amen.