

Pastor Letter: Transfiguration of our Lord (2/19/23)

It is with a heavy heart that I am sitting at my desk writing this letter that corresponds with our weekly scriptural passages, the upcoming Ash Wednesday service, the beginning of the Lenten liturgical season, and the current surrounding events.

This Sunday we are highlighting the “glory of God” and the “transfiguration of our Lord.” The Sunday scriptures between Baptism of our Lord and the Transfiguration uplifted the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. We transition this Sunday of the Transfiguration when Jesus Christ sets his face toward Jerusalem for his triumphant entry on Palm Sunday, his passion week that ends with his death on a wooden cross on Good Friday, and his 3-day burial in a borrowed tomb.

Starting on Ash Wednesday and ending with Palm Sunday we celebrate the solemn Lenten season. Historically, this has been a period of self-examination, soul searching, penitent exercises, spiritual practices, and drawing closer to Almighty God. Typically, many congregations remove the “Alleluia,” Gloria Patri, Doxology, and the ringing of church bells during their worship services of this Lenten season.

Often individuals will withhold personal and physical amenities during this 40-day fasting and prayer season. Sadly much of these empty practices become rote and lack the true spiritual nature of heartfelt confession, repentance, and penitence.

For the past several weeks I have been preaching from the OT prophets and the NT epistles on the worship of God vs. the worship of the evil one. I am amazed at the heresies the epistle writers addressed in the early churches are the same unorthodox evil practices that are flourishing in our congregations and communities today.

I have also become vividly aware of the spiritual attacks of the evil one in the various arenas of my ministry. Since I became the clergy person on the Kairos Advisory Team and clergy team of the inside team of our upcoming Kairos weekend in the Lake Erie Correctional Institution at Conneaut, Ohio, we have noticed a long list of unusual physical, emotional, and spiritual attacks on our Kairos people. The clergy team is engaged in a constant daily battle of spiritual warfare against the powers of evil.

A group of pastors from the Franklin Area Ministerium has become aware of an unorthodox sect that is forming at least 10 different local study groups in Venango County that are teaching unchristian heresies. Many Biblically uneducated individuals in our local churches are attracted to these misguided study groups. Sadly, misinformed church leaders are embracing this unorthodox proselytizing movement.

The United Methodist Church is currently experiencing the fractionization of their congregations and their pastoral leadership. Sadly, our congregation is involved in the same type process of denominational fractionization.

The writer of 2 Peter is addressing a fractionization in his congregation much like what we observed in the Corinthian church the past several weeks. One group of leaders are teaching that the events of Jesus’ teaching, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension are a series of myths that never really took place. The writer of 2 Peter uses the personal eye witness testimony of the three apostles who experienced the glorious Transfiguration of Jesus as proof of their orthodox message, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ We

ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain,” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Not everyone is ready to embrace the divine still quiet voice of God or the testimony of someone who has spiritually experienced a glorious encounter with Almighty God. As the writer of 2 Peter documents, “So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,” (v. 19). The author is alluding to the second coming of Jesus Christ and the culmination of the Kingdom of God. At the Transfiguration, the glory of God radiated through the human Jesus the Christ so that the disciples witnessed the light of Christ for themselves.

Our OT passage from Exodus describes how Moses went upon Mount Sinai to receive the stone tablets from God. God’s presence was witnessed in the cloud, the fiery light, and his voice much like what we read about from the gospel account of Jesus’ Transfiguration. We read in Exodus, “Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights,” (24:15-18).

That same light of Christ illuminates the spiritual darkness in our world today. Not everyone is able to embrace that divine spiritual light but chooses to remain in a spiritual darkness, worshipping the evil one of this fallen world instead of Almighty God. We are currently living in an atheistic culture that embraces the spiritual darkness and viciously attacks anyone who chooses to walk in the spiritual light of Jesus Christ and God’s glory.

May we have the courage to set aside a quiet time each day during the 40 Day season of Lent in order to listen intently for the still quiet voice of God, examine our spiritual journey of faith, confess our sinful practices, seek the light of Christ, and engage with the Word of God. May we learn to put on the full spiritual armor of God, embrace the power of the Holy Spirit, resist the temptations of the evil one, walk with our Lord as he travels to Jerusalem, and die with him during passion week.

May this Lenten season be a truly repentant spiritual transformation where we learn to worship Almighty God and become faithful disciples of our Lord and Savior.

Pastor Larry