

Sermon for the Transfiguration of Our Lord February 15, 2026 jj
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Peter wrote his second epistle from prison. Not a comfortable nor cushy place. It was a dark, dirty, and lonely place, full of fear, and most times it seemed devoid of all hope. When you sing with the prophet Isaiah, "The people that in darkness sat," don't forget about Peter and all the other apostles and prophets who did time unjustly because they proclaimed the One true Savior, Christ Jesus the Son of God. Of course, these pillars of the early church knew that heaven was their true home and soon, perhaps within mere days like it was with Peter, they would be rid of all that pain and persecution and depart to be with Christ, which is better by far, as Paul once said. We all need to be reminded of that perspective every day, even though those painful trials we face will still attack us in this earthly life.

Peter must have had a good amount of time in prison to recall memories of the past. There must have been so much from the three years or so that he was a disciple of Jesus, when he and the other eleven were following Him around and learning so much that the Holy Spirit would later bring to their remembrance. But of all the memories that Peter could possibly recall, he wrote in his last recorded letter about the time when he witnessed the Transfiguration, that is, the time when he and two other disciples with him saw the face of Jesus shine radiant and his clothes turned white as light. Moses and Elijah appeared in heavenly glory with Him and they had a conversation over what Jesus will soon do for the salvation of the entire world.

What a life-changing day that must have been for Peter! Truly astounding, both to his eyes and ears! For Peter not only saw Jesus in full Son-of-God glory, but he also heard the voice of the Father speak from out of the radiant cloud, "This is my beloved Son. With Him I am well pleased." There could be no way anyone who witnessed that could ever forget it! Do you suppose that glorious memory encouraged Peter when he sat in that dark prison, that total opposite of the exalted mountaintop which was filled with God's light? You would think so, but no, Peter himself says there's something that's even greater and even more of an assurance than that experience could provide.

Peter was fully aware of what the enemies of the Christian faith were saying. He was aware of the charge out there that all this Jesus stuff was just a cleverly devised myth. Just think of that: not even a generation had passed after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and still there were people spreading the untruth that it had never happened! It's not just a 21st century idea, and such slanderous bunk has been around long before books and films like the Da Vinci Code were ever hatched in anyone's brain. Would Peter and the other disciples of Jesus have gone through such agony of persecution if any one of them knew that Jesus was a hoax? Surely somebody would have caved in! He would have been celebrated in the skeptical media as the ultimate whistleblower! No, Peter was entirely convinced for himself, yet this loving pastor, a true shepherd of souls, found it necessary to write by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of those in

the church, including you so many centuries later, so as to relieve the uneasiness that doubt can bring to your heart.

What would bring that full assurance to you? What would tell you once and for all that you should never give up on being Christian? What would prove conclusively to you or to someone you've been talking to that Christ is not a myth? Would it be an experience like Peter had? Just think of the extra confidence that could well up within you if you had a direct contact with your risen Lord and Savior! And while He's at it, let God appear in awesome majesty to that unbeliever and knock 'em down flat.

Maybe you had a moment in your life when you felt close to God, so much so that you sensed yourself directly in contact with Him. Everything fell into place then, your assurance was high, and your commitment to the Lord was unflappable. Sometimes, God allows such wonderful moments to happen in a person's life, and there's nothing wrong at all with that. There are Christians, however, including some Lutherans, who are being taught to believe that they aren't a Christian, or at least not a fully-developed and sanctified believer, unless they've had one of those emotional "mountaintop" experiences. They may be deceived into thinking that their often-manufactured euphoria must endure or even increase, and it must translate into a morally spotless life free of suffering, or else something must be wrong with their faith. Yet an unbiblical demand such as this is one of the surest ways to pull you away from Jesus and it does serious harm to the true faith that the Holy Spirit planted within your heart by your hearing His Word. It also strengthens the skeptics and unbelievers who are always out there collecting whatever so-called

evidence that they could find to portray Christians as wild-eyed do-gooders, or plain hypocrites.

That's why Peter writes what he remembers of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the "holy mountain," not to boast of his personal experience, but in order to give you what really matters for your day-to-day Christian life. Indeed, he said "we were with Him, we heard the voice, we saw His glory," all to put the naysayers to silence. But for you, for the believers, there's something more, and Peter says specifically that you would do well to pay attention to it. Whether you're literally in a dark, dirty place like prison or not, whether you're aware of your spiritual darkness of sin or not, take heed of this light because it's the only true comfort you need. Everything else in this world will at one time or another leave you helpless and lonely. What is it? The Gospel. Who speaks it? Jesus does, for after all, God the Father said, "Listen to Him!"

And your Lord says, I came to earth and I, the glorious Son of God was born in your fallen human flesh. I came, not to hand down to you more rules to follow but to wash your sins away from you. I, Jesus says, I who knew no sin became sin for your sake. I took your heavy burden of guilt and removed it from your shoulders and carried it along with the cross to die for you. I gave my life willingly as your ransom from prison. My light has shined in your darkness, so that you could sing that ancient psalm with confidence, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

Listen to Jesus, who not only died, but also rose from the dead, for He who took your

sins to the grave with Him, has left your sins there in His empty tomb. Your offense against God remains dead and buried, but you are raised up with your Savior to walk in the newness of life. This renewal is the Holy Spirit's gift to you, not an achievement that you have to produce for yourself. Think of the Transfiguration story again: what was the mightiest, and most Gospel-filled moment of that event? Was it the blinding light? No, Jesus always had that absolute power with Him, only at the other times when people saw Him, He simply refrained from displaying His full majesty. So was it the sudden appearance of Moses and Elijah in splendor? No, they were always there as part of the whole company of heaven. Was it the voice from God the Father? No, somebody had to step in to stop Peter from talking nonsense.

Instead of all those flashy, knock 'em dead, remember it forever parts of the story, God's true Gospel power was revealed when it was all over, when the light faded, the prophets hidden from sight, the Father's voice stopped speaking, and there was no one but Jesus only. And just like Elijah discovered God not in the earthquake, wind or fire, but rather in the still, small whisper, so it was for Peter, James and John on the mount of Transfiguration. Jesus, plain-looking ordinary Jesus, came and touched them and said, "Rise, and have no fear." That was the truly powerful moment in the story, the moment of forgiveness, of a gentle but sufficient removal of all their fear, the moment when day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart. You experienced that powerful moment in your life when plain, ordinary water poured over you along with the mighty words of Holy Baptism. God the Father has proclaimed He is well pleased with you.

So Jesus bids you today, do not fear, for He is close to you, even at those times when you don't feel close to Him. In fact, He is even closer to you now than He was to Moses and his companions who dined with God on that mountain in Exodus. The holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is here for you to eat with your own mouth, so that you would be strengthened in the one true faith to life everlasting. Here in Holy Communion you've been given your direct contact with God! It's not a passing experience that you have to recall from memory later, rather it's the holy food of Divine forgiveness that you need for daily life in this world. You may feel the bumps and bruises of carrying your cross along with Jesus, but His gentle, reassuring touch is always there. And soon the great, final day shall dawn when Christ shall come again. He, the Light-bringer, the bright and shining Morning Star, shall appear to you so that you too will glow bright in His reflection, with the same brilliance as Jesus had in His Transfiguration. For you who once sat in the prison-darkness of sin have seen the great light of God's forgiveness for your sin and eternal life in resurrected glory awaits for Moses, Elijah, Peter, all the saints, and you as well.

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.