

One of the important events in the life of Jesus Christ was the Transfiguration; it is recorded in three of the four gospels. In the church calendar it occurs on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Now we got so busy this year that we didn't get to discuss it on February 27. So I want to go back and look at this key event in the life and ministry of Jesus. Our scripture text for this morning is taken from the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 2 through 9.

Read Mark 9:2-9

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him and goes to the top of Mount Tabor. There He is transformed before His disciples. This morning's text says that His clothes became dazzling white; whiter than anyone could bleach them. Now I'm surprised that neither Tide or Oxy-Clean has not used this event in one of their commercials. The Gospel of Matthew says that Jesus' face shone like the sun. In a sense, He returned for a moment to His glorious state as the Son of God as He was before He took on the body of a human being with all its weaknesses and sinful nature. Then Moses the great lawgiver and Elijah the great prophet appeared with Him.

The disciples were afraid and Peter, as usual, began speaking before thinking. Let's build three shelters he suggested, maybe hoping to prolong this mountaintop experience. But then came a voice from a cloud proclaiming: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him." Then as quickly as Moses and Elijah had appeared they vanished; leaving Jesus with the three startled disciples. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until He had risen from the grave.

Now I have read this passage numerous times, heard many sermons on it, and even preached on it myself several times, but as I studied it this week something new jumped out at me. I have always focused on Jesus being transfigured, and occasionally on the re-appearance of Moses and Elijah after so many centuries. But I had never looked at it through the eyes of Peter, James, and John. Think about it, they had been with Jesus for a little under three years; traveling all over the countryside watching Him teach and heal people, sitting with Him, sharing meals and being in His presence almost constantly; and yet, when they got to the top of the mountain, they saw Jesus in a totally different light. He was transformed before their very eyes. The scriptures don't say it, but it is implied that their eyes were opened and they clearly saw Jesus for the first time; they gained a better understanding of His nature and character.

This reminded me of the story that you may have heard before about a little boy whose dog had a litter of puppies. His father told him that he couldn't keep the puppies, and that he needed to find a good home for them. So he went around the neighborhood knocking on doors asking if anyone wanted to buy a Methodist puppy for \$5. Unfortunately, he was not able to

sell any of them. A few weeks later, he made another round of the neighborhood. He knocked on one door and the man asked how much the puppies were. The boy said \$10. The man replied, "The last time you were here they were only \$5, what changed?" To which the boy replied: "Before they were Methodist puppies, but now they are Baptist puppies because their eyes are finally open; they have seen the light."

Now the appearance of Moses and Elijah adds to the significance of this event. If you remember Moses was the great lawgiver in the Old Testament. He also went up onto a mountain and there received the Ten Commandments. Elijah was the great prophet who made a trip up a mountain himself to hear the whisper of God and to receive new instructions for his ministry. In addition, Elijah was one of only two people in the Bible who never suffered the pains of death, but was taken up into heaven on a fiery chariot. As Jesus prepared to go to the cross, His Father sent the great Lawgiver and the great Prophet of the Old Testament to counsel Him; basically to give Him a pep-talk. The significance of this is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law, prophecies, and promises of the Old Testament. It all came together for the disciples as they saw Jesus standing and talking with Moses and Elijah. They began to understand; they saw Jesus in a new light.

This afternoon several of us are going to the Isotopes baseball game. You already know I love baseball. Someone once said that baseball is the only orderly thing in an unordered world. If you get three strikes, even the best lawyer in the world can't get you another strike. Leo Durocher, former manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, said: "Baseball is like church; many attend, but few understand." Or as Erma Bombeck once noted: "Some say our national pastime is baseball. Not me; it's gossip." Finally, the late great Yogi Berra said: "Baseball is 90 percent mental and the other half is physical." You have to love Yogi's sayings!

I love playing baseball, watching it and coaching it. I enjoyed coaching my sons when they were growing up. They both started out in T-ball, and then my younger son Ben played baseball all the way through High School and even tried out for the team at Vanderbilt University. Now I have had the opportunity to coach both of my grandsons Trevor and Logan, and this season, along with my son Ben, I am coaching Logan's Little League Team the Pirates.

As I have coached my sons and grandsons, I must have said a thousand times over the years: "Keep your eye on the ball." The batter hears this at every ballgame from the coaches, parents and fans. In Logan's league, the players pitch, and he hears it from his dad and me all the time. I know that he is getting tired of it, but that's the key to being a good hitter, seeing the ball. Another phrase players hear a lot is "look the ball onto the bat;" eye-hand coordination is essential to good hitting.

At one time or another, most of us have tried to hit a baseball with varying degrees of success. Hitting is sort of an art. You have to keep your body – hands, head, shoulders, and feet in the proper position, and then as the ball is delivered by the pitcher, swing at the right time keeping your eye on the ball. For great hitters, the ball almost slows down because they can pick-up its speed and movement so well. They are able to hit it because they see it so clearly.

Now if every pitcher just threw fastballs, hitting would be a lot easier and more people would be playing professional baseball. In the movie *Major League*, there is a scene where a player who is trying out for the team is hitting the ball out of the park on every pitch. The manager asks his assistant coach why this guy had not been playing in the major leagues before now. The assistant then signals to the pitcher to start throwing change-ups, off speed pitches. The batter misses every pitch, just swinging at the air. He could not hit curve balls and change-ups. He could not see the ball clearly.

You know that life does not always go the way we want it to. At times, life throws us change-ups, curves, and occasionally inside fast balls that knock us off our feet. I once sent one of my sons a card that said: “When life throws you a curve ball, hit a home run.” When we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can also hit a home run and endure anything that life throws our way.

Do you see Jesus clearly; do you have a clear understanding of who He is and what He can do for you? Sometimes we can't see Jesus because of all the things that are on our minds. I bet that Peter, James, and John suffered from the same spiritual blindness that we do at times. They, like us, let the problems of everyday life get in the way of seeing Jesus as we should.

As the disciples walked up the mountain with Jesus, talking with Him, listening to Him, and spending quality time with Him one-on-one, the scales of bitterness, jealousy, selfishness, gossip, complaining and pride slowly dropped from their eyes, and when they got to the top of the mountain, they were able to see Jesus as God intended for us to see and know our Lord and Savior. That's why having a daily quiet time of prayer and Bible reading with the Lord is so essential to our spiritual growth. These times along with Bible study and weekly worship help us remove these scales that hinder our spiritual sight, that blinds us to the Lord working in our life.

Now I'm not talking about getting a new set of glasses to help us see clearly. However, I would like to have a pair of glasses like two boys were discussing one day. One of them asked his playmate: “Wouldn't you hate to wear glasses all the time?” “No,” replied the other boy, “Not if I had the kind of glasses that my grandma wears. She sees how to fix a lot of things, and she sees lots of nice things to do on rainy days, and she sees when folks are tired and sad, and what will make them feel better, and she always sees what you meant to do even when you haven't got things right. I asked her one day how she was able to see that way all the time, and she said

that it was a way she learned to look at things as she grew older. So it must be her glasses.” Now that boy’s grandma really saw the world through the eyes of Jesus. Wouldn’t you like to have a pair of glasses like that?

Do you want to be like Peter, James and John, and see Jesus in a different light, know Him better and understand what His will for your life is? Do you want to improve your personal relationship with Jesus? You can; all it takes is to show the same effort and passion that the baseball players will exhibit this afternoon at the game.

First, you need to have the desire to know Him and grow closer to Him. Because I’ll tell you the truth, the better you get to know Jesus, the more likely He’s going to get you to change your life in some ways. You have to be willing to make the effort and be willing to make the necessary changes to walk closer with Him and to become the person that He created you to be. When kids first start playing baseball, there is a selfish tendency on the part of some coaches to let them hit anyway they can so long as they make contact with the ball. Thus, many kids develop bad habits and techniques because they are not taught the basic fundamentals of hitting.

Unfortunately, as they get older and move up into the higher age groups, these bad habits hinder them and hold them back. Thus, the kid who was a star in T-ball now rides the bench in Little League because he didn’t have the desire to listen and learn the proper techniques or somebody didn’t take the time to teach him. We each need to take time and carefully look at our life and see if we have developed any bad habits that are keeping us from seeing Jesus clearly and growing closer to Him in our personal relationship. We need to ask ourselves: “What do I need to change in my life to make me a better Christian? What’s hindering my spiritual growth?”

Next we need to continually practice. Most of us only see the ball players at the games; we don’t see all the time and effort they put in every day behind the scenes practicing not only their hitting, but also their fielding and base running. That’s why Spring Training is so important before the start of the season; to get in shape and work out the kinks. In addition, every ball player goes through some sort of hitting slump during the season; when they just don’t see the ball as clearly as they did before and thus they strike out a lot. That’s why our Little League team practices every Sunday afternoon.

Hitting involves not only seeing the ball, but having the proper timing and basic techniques in your swing. For example, if you drop your shoulder as you follow through; you will either strike out or hit a pop-up. Thus, baseball players practice their hitting every day during the season trying to maintain their timing and seeing the ball better. Likewise, we as Christians are called to practice each and every day because, like hitters, we can get into a slump with all the demands and temptations that come our way. You don’t get to know Jesus better and draw

closer to Him by just spending one hour a week in worship. You know what you call a baseball player who only spends one hour a week practicing – a former baseball player. We each need to spend time alone with the Lord every day; make Him our constant companion.

During the coming weeks and months of this summer, make a commitment to focus on Jesus and your personal relationship with Him. Practice keeping your eyes focused on Him and His will for your life. Look for Jesus in the people and events of each day. Let's be like Peter, James, and John, and see Jesus in a different light, see Him clearer. Remember the lyrics of our previous hymn: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." Let this be your desire each and every day. I pray that each one of you will come to know and see Jesus better than ever before. Amen