

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
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The Transfiguration of our Lord
February 18, 2007
Luke 9:28-36

"An Exodus Conversation"
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

You may have looked at the theme for this sermon in the bulletin and wondered just what it has to do with Transfiguration. "An Exodus Conversation" does not particularly sound like the theme for a sermon on this festival day in the church year at the end of the Epiphany season. Yet if we look closely at the Scriptures for today and understand the lessons to be learned from the Transfiguration of our Lord, we will see that "An Exodus Conversation" is actually quite appropriate. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our hearing of His Word this day.

I. Moses

If I would ask you to do a word association between the word Exodus and a person, who would that person be? Most assuredly, it would be Moses. Now it should be noted that in this first part of our Exodus conversation, Moses is mentioned in all three of the readings for today. The Old Testament Lesson relates the death of Moses and how he went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, opposite Jericho. And there the Lord showed him all the land which was the fulfillment of the promise to the children of Israel. For though he was allowed to see it, he was not allowed to enter into it. And upon his death, the Lord buries him, but no one knows where. And the Old Testament lesson concludes "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." In those words much of the imagery of Exodus should be brought to your minds. The burning bush in the wilderness, the confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues and wonders in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the law on Mount Sinai and the tablets of stone, the rock split and water rushing forth, the tabernacle in the wilderness, manna from heaven. All the great and saving acts of God in leading his people out of slavery to the promised land. All those Exodus images should be in our mind's eye.

II. Jesus Greater Than Moses

The Epistle lesson for this day also talks about Moses but only in comparison with Jesus. Listen again to the words of the writer to the Hebrews: "...Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to Him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much as more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." In this comparison we see the glory of Jesus announced and it is that glory that we

see as well in the Transfiguration account in the Gospel for today.

Jesus takes Peter and James and John and ascends a mountain to pray. Many Biblical scholars believe that the mountain is Mount Hermon, the great high mountain to the north of Galilee or one of its foothills. And while Jesus prays, his appearance is transfigured (that is, changed) His clothing is dazzling white. And Moses and Elijah talk with him. It is interesting that not only Moses but Elijah are present. In the Old Testament, two individuals ascend Mount Sinai where God speaks with them. Those two are Moses and Elijah. Now here on this mountain, Jesus converses with them. What a sight this must have been. But most interesting, what is it that they speak about? St. Luke writes that they spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. This is one place where none of the current English translations do a very good job. For the Greek word used by the evangelist is "exodus" – the very same word used for the second book of the Old Testament and for the event described there. How remarkable, Jesus, Moses and Elijah truly have an Exodus conversation.

Now this exodus of Jesus is of course different from the Exodus of Israel. But in another sense, the Exodus of Israel was filled with prophetic imagery of the saving work of our Lord. Think of the Passover lamb and the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. The angel of death in the tenth plague will "pass over" those who have sprinkled the blood of the lamb. Think of the saving work of God for his people. And Jesus' journey will take him to another mountain outside of Jerusalem where he will give up his life for us.

Now all this is witnessed by Peter, James, and John. Peter speaks for them all, "Master it is good that we are here, let us make three tents, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Now this was not exactly a practical suggestion, for Moses and Elijah needed no earthly dwelling as they dwell in eternity in the presence of the glory of God. And Jesus had a work to do. But at that moment the glory of God came in the form of a cloud. And again we have an Exodus image. Think of the cloud of fire and smoke upon Mount Sinai. And the cloud of glory that led the children of Israel in the wilderness as well as the cloud of glory that overshadowed the tabernacle. And from this glorious cloud which has already filled them with the fear of the presence of the holy God, comes the Father's voice: "This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!" Jesus has the words of life. Jesus has the words of truth. Jesus will teach them of his saving work. And then it is over. Moses and Elijah depart. And Jesus alone is with them there. The glory has departed from them, but Jesus is still there. And Jesus will lead them.

III. Our Exodus Journey.

Now they must leave the mount and go down to the plain. And Jesus must continue on his "exodus"–his journey to the cross. And his disciples, they too will follow him. At first uncomprehending and misunderstanding, but later they too will give their lives in his service. How very appropriate that these thoughts should be present for us on this Transfiguration

[Sunday] as we look ahead to the Lenten season which begins Wednesday (Ash Wednesday) It is especially appropriate that our Lenten theme this year is Coming Home from Exile: The Exoduses of the Scriptures. We have an exodus journey as well. And yet our Exodus journey is not just something that we do in these coming weeks, though the Lenten season should still be seen by each of us as a wonderful time of preparation and examination. But our exodus journey is found in each of our lives as we go through this world as pilgrims and strangers. And even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil for our Good Shepherd is with us. What a comfort and hope we must find in our faith in Christ, in our trust in Him. For his journey has sanctified and fulfilled our journeys through life. His exodus has brought us out from sin and death.

The glorious vision of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration did not last. But Moses and Elijah, Peter, James, and John, and all the saints are a reminder to us that the vision of glory is still to come. In a real way, the glorification of Jesus upon the mount of transfiguration was a preview of the Resurrection. And that Lord Jesus will come again in glory with all his saints. Then the Exodus will be a homecoming in Him forevermore.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here
Yet we may not remain.
But since thou bidd'st us leave the mount.
Come with us to the plain.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.