

Transfiguration Sermon
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We Christians have a very unfortunate tendency to sometimes miss the mark when it comes to our faith. We think hurtful thoughts, we say and do hurtful things, and we neglect to do things which we should do. Hence why, during the confession, we recognize that we have sinned against God “in thought, and word, and deed—by what we have done and by what we have left undone.” None of us is perfect. We all sin. And there are going to be times when we make an honest attempt to do good, but fail. There are going to be times when we give in to the temptation to do wrong, or refrain from doing good. Though this truth is obviously not ideal, it is our reality as fallen human beings; and we can recognize when we fall short of living the way God would have us live and resolve to do better.

What tends to be more concerning, what can sometimes be more insidious, is when we do not realize we are missing the mark—when we’re acting in ways that are sinful while believing we are doing the righteous thing. Today we are celebrating the feast of the Transfiguration, commemorating when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain top—his face transforming and his clothes becoming a dazzling white, and Moses and Elijah appearing and speaking to Christ. We are told in the Gospel of look that, having witnessed this miraculous event, Peter responds by expressing a desire to build three dwelling places, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. However, we also learn that Peter’s desire to do this was misguided. We are told he made this suggestion, “not knowing what he said.” It’s made pretty clear that Peter was misled in his desire to build these dwellings.

What makes Peter’s ignorance so surprising is that in all of the Gospel accounts the Transfiguration occurs just days after Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. It’s especially jarring for us when we realize that just six days before Peter acted out of ignorance, he had acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah. We would prefer that Peter be transformed after that revelation, and to then speak out of wisdom and faithfulness. But I’m more inclined to think that even after Peter knew that Jesus was the Messiah, and even after he went up with Jesus and saw the miraculous transformation that Jesus underwent—his face shining like the sun and his clothes turning dazzling white—Peter did not always know how to act in reaction to his faith. Peter probably thought that building these dwellings would be a good thing—that it would Please Christ and Moses and Elijah. Though he was wrong, he thought he was doing something right. And it’s that fact that makes this story become much more concerning when we really think about it.

As I mentioned before, all followers of Christ are going to miss the mark at some points—we are going to do the wrong things and fail to do the right things. But when this happens we’d hope that we’d recognize our mistakes and try to learn from them, resolving to work harder to live our lives in the ways God would have us live. Yet Peter’s example on the Mount of the Transfiguration shows us that even those who were closest to Christ could be misled in their thoughts or actions without even realizing it. It’s one thing when we sin and can recognize and acknowledge it. It’s another when we sin and don’t even realize it!

Now Peter’s mistake wasn’t a grave one. After identifying Jesus as the Son of God, a voice from a cloud commands Peter, James, and John “listen to him!” And so Peter’s erroneous idea was soon forgotten and never acted upon (unless you count the church that was built on the site of the Transfiguration, which contains a chapel each for Christ, Moses, and Elijah, but I digress). But unfortunately, sometimes when followers of Christ become misguided, the consequences are much more disastrous.

It wasn’t too long ago that Christians used passages such as Ephesians 6:5 and Titus 2:9 to justify enslaving African Americans in the U.S. And what is most disturbing about this fact is that many of those people who tried to claim this *believed themselves to be right in the eyes of God!* As much as we’d like to comfort ourselves by thinking that times have changed, the fact of the matter is that Christians

continue to support horrible institutions while believing they are acting in accordance to God's will. When Christians gain the reputation of being hateful when Christ taught us "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"; When Christians show a lack of care for their neighbor, forgetting that Christ taught us "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."; When Christians support the mistreatment or even murder of people they disagree with when Christ commanded us "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another"; we must wonder how we have been lead astray.

As much as we might like to think, "well I'm not a hateful person" or "I do things to help those in need" or "I never condone violence against others", we can't just pass the buck on to others. Firstly because there are probably ways that we DO do those things which we'd like to think we'd never do. And secondly because, as members of the body of Christ, what other members of the body do or fail to do affects us—affects the whole church universal. So when we see Christians acting in unchristian ways, we must be willing to speak out against their actions, and try to demonstrate how Christ would have his followers act in our own lives.

But in order to do this, we must first ensure that we ourselves become aware of our own sinfulness, lest we, like Peter, act wrongly in our ignorance. As Christians, we need to be ever vigilant that we are not lead astray by erroneous beliefs about God and Christ. We must take care to ensure that we are following the teachings of Christ, rather than cherry-picking verses to justify our hateful beliefs and actions. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught us that there are two commandments upon which "hang all the law and the prophets": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We must take care in all of our dealings that we do not lose sight of these commandments, lest we fall into sin, unaware of our descent. May our common confession help us keep sight of the teachings of Christ, and aid us in our efforts to turn away from sin, and turn towards God. May our common worship help us to more deeply know and understand the will of God and give us power faithfully to accomplish it. And above all let us remember that God is merciful, and forgives us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthens us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keeps us in eternal life. Amen.