

Things Seen and Unseen

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Sermon 2018-02-11 - Year B - Last Sunday of Epiphany (Transfiguration)

1 Kings 19:9–18; Psalm 27; 2 Peter 1:13–21; Mark 9:2–9

- Each Sunday, following the sermon, we stand together and confess our faith saying “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”
- What do we mean when we say “seen and unseen”?
- It is a declaration that the things we can observe with our five senses are only a part of reality, that there is a whole universe filled with things which we can’t see.
- This is a very counter-cultural statement in our scientific world.
- In the Gospel passage today, God gives Peter, James, and John a brief glimpse of that which is usually unseen.
- What is this event all about?

Authentication of Jesus’ Ministry

- Remember, in the season of Epiphany, we are remembering events in the life of Jesus which reveal who he really is. Nothing does this more clearly than the Transfiguration.
- Compare with Jesus’ baptism. “*And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*” (Mark 1:11, ESV) These two events are bookends on this season of Revelation.
- In the event just before this in the Gospel of Mark, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ. When Jesus is transfigured, Peter’s declaration is confirmed.
- Jesus has been talking and teaching, but his authority to do so comes from who he is as God’s beloved Son, the second person of the Trinity.
- When the Father says “Listen to him” he is declaring Jesus’ authority to teach.
- Peter later reflects on this experience in his second letter. 2 Peter 1:16-18.
 - The transfiguration made quite an impression!
- “Peter’s confidence about his own future, and his reason for encouraging his readers’ spiritual growth, rests on personal experience of the power and presence of the Lord Jesus, and not on tales dreamed up by human wisdom.”¹

Reassurance for the Days Ahead

- Just after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus tells his disciples, for the first time, about the death that he will die.
- This is the half-way point in the three synoptic Gospels, and the beginning of the road to the crucifixion. This is part of what makes this a fitting passage to read on the last Sunday before Lent.

¹ David H. Wheaton, “2 Peter,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; 4th ed.; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1391.

- Imagine that you are Peter watching Jesus' trial or hearing about his crucifixion from afar. Those three days when Jesus was in the tomb must have been discouraging.
- The transfiguration would have given him something to hold onto.
- Jesus even connects this transfiguration with his resurrection, telling the three witnesses to keep quiet until after he had risen from the dead (9:9).
- Some commentators call this a preview of the resurrection and of the glory of the kingdom coming in all its fullness.²

Reassurance for our own battles today

- The transfiguration wasn't just for the three disciples who witnessed it. The transfiguration (and other stories about Jesus) continue to reassure us today.
- In the pages of Scripture, we have a record of both Jesus' teaching and also his deeds.
- We see that Jesus was exactly who he said he was, and that he has power to conquer sickness and death.
- This helps us to believe that the power at work in the days of the apostles is still at work in the Church today as the Kingdom of God continues to break into this world.
- We heard the great commission last week, including Jesus' promise that "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).
- We all face discouragement from time to time. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that cause us to despair. Situations where we can't think of any possible way out.
- Elijah was in a situation just like that in the passage we read today. 1 Kings 19:10
- God's response 19:15-18, God reminds him that he is not alone.
- Elijah's vision was limited to the things that he could see, but God's vision is much bigger, he sees the whole situation, things seen and unseen, and he has the power to make things happen!

Conclusion

- Elijah saw everyone turn against him. God saw an army of 7,000 who were still loyal.
- Peter saw in Jesus the long awaited Christ, the anointed one who had been chosen from long ago to bring God's people to victory, a victory that they thought was against the Romans.
- God saw in Jesus his beloved Son, the second person of the Trinity who had existed with him from before the foundation of the world. God saw a victory in Jesus that was far greater, he saw a victory over death itself!
- So where can we turn when we are cornered, when the enemy is breathing down our necks, when things aren't going well at work, or at church, or at home?
- We can turn to God who holds the world in the palm of his hand.
- "This is how I fight my battles. It may look like I'm surrounded but I'm surrounded by you." Elyssa Smith, Upper Room Music.
- Psalm 27:1-4 We have no need to fear.

² James A. Brooks, Mark (vol. 23; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 141.