

Theme: **Here I Am**

Text: Mark 9: 2 – 9

Date: February 11, 2018

Season: Transfiguration Sunday

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let God transform your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Luke and Briana quickly unbuckled themselves and hurried out of the car as we came to a stop next to the playground in the park. “Watch me, Dad!” they both said as they ran off to the playground. Luke climb up a climbing pole to the top of the playground equipment while Briana ran up the steps of the slide and came down the slide quickly landing on her feet to run back up the steps again. They ran, swung and played on one thing after another as I watched them. Too soon for them I said, “It time to get back to the house.” “But Dad, we just got here,” they both said in their own way. “Would you like to stay longer?” I asked. “Yes, Dad, can we?” they both said with a tone of hope. “I wish we could, but I’ve got to get the lawn mowed and the garage cleaned out before it gets dark, so we need to go.” “Dad,” Briana said with her cutes smile, “Can we come back later and play?” “Yes, we can, when the work is done, but we need to get home first.” “Is that a promise?” asks Luke. “It’s a promise, I’ll bring you back to play in this park again.”

The glory of heaven shown to the three disciples on the mount of Transfiguration was quiet appealing. Who could blame them for wanting to stay longer, if not forever? Just in the past few days the Apostle Peter had made his great confession that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Then Jesus when on to tell them about His death and resurrection, about denying oneself, picking up one’s cross, losing one’s life for another and many other things that were hard to understand. All that had been going on in just the past few days and that made standing in heaven with Moses and Elijah seem a whole lot better.

What about you? Does standing in heaven and having a conversation with Moses, Elijah and Jesus seem a whole lot better than your last couple days? It probably would if the last word that you heard when you visit your doctor was ‘Cancer.’ It probably would if your boss just came up to you and said, “We’re going to have to let you go.” It probably would if you just received a phone call from the police about one of your loves ones in a deadly accident. Just as we are all prone to relying on worldly diversions, such as working in your

shop, fishing, golfing, watching videos, surfing the net, reading a book, shopping, gardening and many other distraction from the reality of life, it sure would be nice to come upon some heavenly interruptions like having a conversation with Moses and Elijah. How powerless life's problems would be if we were allowed a conversation with Moses to talk about standing on Holy ground and talking with the great "I AM" or escaping from Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, or standing in the presents of God while He carves the tablets of the Ten Commandments. How powerless life's problems would be if we were allowed a conversation with Elijah about facing the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah and then seeing the fire come down from heaven and licking up the sacrifice, the altar and the water or talking about talking with God with His still quiet voice after all the threats against your life or taking a ride to heaven on a fiery chariot. Oh, a sustained heavenly visit does have its appeal when looking at all the challenges that we have to face each day, doesn't it?

For Jesus though, securing that heavenly glory for all of us had a greater appeal and that's why he knew He had to go back down that mountain of Transfiguration to another hill just outside the city of Jerusalem. Oh, Jesus had His conversation with Moses and Elijah but it wasn't about traveling with the people of Israel for 40 years or all the signs and miracles that God had done through the prophets of old to bring His people back to believe in Him. No, Jesus' conversation was about how He would be that lamb of God whose blood would be shed on the Cross of Calvary so that the angel of death would pass over all of us. Jesus' conversation was about how He was the one to fulfill the plan of salvation for all the world. Yes, Jesus would descent from the mount of Transfiguration not to shoe people their problems or a temporary diversion but to go to the crest of mount Calvary to cure the problems of all our lives, sin, death and the power of the devil by His life, death and resurrection so that we can have the eternal glory of God now and for all eternity.

Yes, Jesus lead His disciples back down the mountain of Transfiguration because they had been strengthened to meet what how needed to come – Jesus' suffering and their sharing of the Good News. Through the eyes of faith, we too are given a heavenly meeting with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as He gives us His body and blood for the assurance that all our sins have been taken care of and we are given the nourishment to sustain us as we participate in this world. Yes, through God's Word and Sacraments we are strengthened to meet what is

coming, for Jesus Christ has conquered all our sins, death and the power of the devil for us and promises to be with us as we share the Good News.

Following Jesus is not a passive or nonparticipatory life. It's highly interactive, yet there is no works righteousness here, it comes from the abundance of grace and love give to us. It's just that Jesus' followers really do follow, bearing the marks of His life literally (sometimes even unto death) and figuratively (by the crosses they bear in this life), which is not uncommon.

The pains suffered by the first-century and this century Christians are well documented. Scripture itself tell us of the pain, suffering and death of the Apostle Peter, Paul, James and Stephen. In the past century millions of Christians have been persecuted around the world. We all are directly and indirectly being persecuted for our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and as we suffer we picture ourselves walking down the mountain of Transfiguration with Jesus as He says, "I am here with you always and yes, I promise that we will be together once again in the glory of heaven." Ten-year-old Warren answers the essay question "Why do Christians suffer?" with this answer. "Suffering makes Christians become broken and weak, but this allows our negative qualities to drain out to give more space for God's righteousness and love."

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand knows about Christ's strength for him in the midst of suffering and just how important his witness is throughout his suffering. Pastor Wurmbrand was released in 1964 after 14 years of torture in the communist Romanian prisons for his involvement with the Christian underground. He suffered the first three years in a cell 30 feet underground in total darkness and quiet. Dirty, watery soup and daily beatings were customary. He didn't know if his wife and sons were still alive. Still the Lord sustained his life and used him to bring Christ to both fellow inmates and his torturers.

At one time, Pastor Wurmbrand survived on an hour of sleep per night, with no bed and a guard clicking open and shut the spyhole in the door each minute or so. His interrogator threatened him constantly, saying, "Don't you know that I can order your execution tonight?" Wurmbrand spoke of Christ to his torturers, as he said, "Put your hand over my heart. If it beats rapidly from fright than you will know that there is no God and no eternal life. But if it beats calmly, then you will know that I am at peace with God and that there is a God who offers you eternal life." The interrogator instead of putting his hand on

Wurmbrand's chest, struck him in the face and said, "Can't you see that your savior, or whatever you call him, isn't going to open any prison doors?" Wurmbrand replied, "His name is Jesus Christ and if He wishes, He can release me."

After 14 years of this kind of treatment Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was taken out of the darkness and released with no explanation. He was just brought to the front door and pushed out. Though he could hardly walk when he was pushed out the door and he fell to his knees and prayed out loud, "Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for being with me always as I was in the darkness so that I can now see your wondrous world and light once again." He then picked himself up and started walking until he found his wife and two sons. He lived with them and witnessing to others his faith that Jesus is always with him, till he was taken to his heavenly home in 2001.

Yes, my four kids love to play on the playground even today. When they were growing up they didn't like to go home after only an hour at the playground, but when we when home and worked together we got the work done and were able to play some more. They knew that it was sometimes hard work that had to be done. They also knew that if I made a promise, not a deal with them, that they would get to play in that playground longer. That day after all the work was done, all four of my children got to go back and play on the playground until it got dark. As we when home Luke said, "That was fun Dad, but I don't like interruptions?" I know what you mean Luke," I replied, "That's why I'm looking forward to heaven. Where there won't be any interruptions and we will never have to leave."

As followers of Jesus we work and witness and even suffer for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are not earning a trip to heaven, it has already been purchased and promised to us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has earned our trip for us and gives it to us as a gift with the promise, "I will be with you always and will take you to be with Me in heaven." We follow Jesus because we know He is with us always and wants us to be with Him in heaven were there will be no more interruptions of the love, peace and joy God wants to give to us forever. Amen.