

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
Saturday, February 13, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, February 14, 2010 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“A Little Bit of Heaven on Earth”

Luke 9:28-36

We are drawing to the close of the Epiphany Season. On Ash Wednesday, our focus will change. These past weeks, we have seen Jesus manifest His Divine power at the wedding feast at Cana by turning water into wine. Among other miracles, we have seen Jesus cause a great catch of fish. And we have witnessed the Baptism of our Lord, where God the Father spoke from heaven and said, “This is My Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.”

Throughout this season, in our Gospel lessons, we have been witnesses to miraculous and powerful events, where Jesus gives us little glimpses of His Divine Majesty – but the fulness of the His glory was still hidden. In our Gospel today, Luke tells us about the one time when Jesus did not suppress His Divine strength: The Transfiguration of our Lord.

Luke tells us that the appearance of His face changed and that His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. What a sight that must have been -- to witness a little bit of heaven on earth. Given that it is Valentine’s Day, that term “a little bit of heaven on earth” gets thrown around rather loosely. The advertisers tell you that a certain gift, or certain food (chocolates in particular), or perhaps a certain romantic experience will provide “a little bit of heaven on earth.”

After winning the Super Bowl, some fans of the New Orleans Saints partying on Bourbon Street said they “must have died and gone to heaven.” What an odd image of heaven. Imagine Jesus telling a parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a drunken raucous crowd where all around you are the smells of vomit and urine.”

I’ve been to Bourbon Street. When I took my kids to the National Youth Gathering in 2001, I walked them the length of Bourbon Street. It’s a dark, narrow alley, and even at 10:00 in the morning, it smells like vomit and urine.

Sin and Satan always substitute the truth with a lie. You can have “a little bit of heaven on earth” if you just bend the rules a little bit. You could be truly happy if you just had a different spouse. He or she is holding you back. Or keep your spouse, but have your fun. Anyway, “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”

Or on the other side: For those who strive to be faithful, you need to work harder. You aren’t doing enough. You certainly could have done more today. Don’t you want to provide the best for your family? They deserve “a little bit of heaven on earth.” And you aren’t giving it to them.

Do not substitute the truth with a lie. There is only one path to heaven. Christ our Lord says, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”

But what is heaven like? We have been told about heaven. Ezekiel and Paul give us a few glimpses of it in Scripture. And being in heaven, being in the presence of the full glory of God is what we

long for. It sounds like such a wonderful place. Yet, we don't really know what that place is like. All that we know is our life here.

But that is why we are here this morning. Our escape from sin, the lies of Satan, and the false hope of this world is found in what we do here on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. Our God is the God Peter, James, and John found on the Mt. of Transfiguration. We have seen Him. We have heard Him. The God of the Bible is not some impersonal, divine force of nature.

God is found in the person of God the Father who spoke on the mountain, "This is My Son whom I have chosen, listen to Him." God is found in the person of Jesus Christ who walked and talked with Peter, James, and John.

Our Mt. of Transfiguration is right here in our worship. The Holy Spirit comes to us in the Word. We have the physical presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament. When we hear God's Word, we are freed from the lies and the guilt and the burden of this world, and we experience a little bit of the reality that God intended for us from creation. Because of the hearing of God's Word and the faith that has been created through that Word, we are once again in a right relationship with God.

Hearing God's Word and receiving His body and blood in the Sacrament is as close as we can get to heaven here on earth. We don't know exactly what heaven is going to be like. However, of two things we can be certain: there is no doubt that we will be joined with choirs of angels singing praises to the Lord; and like Moses and Elijah

on the Mt. of Transfiguration, we are going to be in bodily form, communing with Christ. We will join in that heavenly conversation.

And secondly, heaven will certainly not be a boring place. There is a reason that when Peter caught just a glimpse of the glory of the resurrection he said, "It is good Lord to be here. Let's build three shelters." Peter did not want to leave.

St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, "To live is Christ, to die is to gain...I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."

We can find comfort in knowing that our loved ones who have died in faith are sharing in that glory as we speak, and with angels, arch-angels, and all the company of heaven, they are glorifying and praising God's Name with us.

We will join them in that eternal glory either when we die in our Baptismal faith or when Christ returns -- whichever comes first. Until that happens, we will continue to gather together as a community of believers and receive a glimpse of heaven in God's Word, in His Absolution, and in His Sacrament.

Here this morning, we are privileged to truly have "a little bit of heaven on earth," and we echo those words of Peter, "It is good Lord to be here." Amen.