

“We Have Something More Sure” (2nd Peter 1:19-21)

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, as believers and disciples of the Lord Jesus we have no interest in myths as the foundation for our faith and as the foundation of truth. We do not base our faith on any fictitious products of the imagination. Sociological, anthropological, and historical reminders as to the value of myth are beside the point. Our children esp. must be guarded against the idea that the saving faith – the Christian faith – is just one more idea among many ideas. And while it was enjoyable taking in the movie “Son of God” (with many good things, and other things lacking -- what can one expect? It’s a movie! – but the risen Jesus did not walk through an open door to greet the disciples for example; John 20 teaches us that He appeared in their midst with the doors locked and -- as Dr. Dawn pointed out -- it was entirely inappropriate that Jesus seemed surprised when Lazarus awoke from death...these details are extremely important and we can’t be careless about them), we must be careful in respect to the subtle or not-so-subtle challenge with Jesus movies: they are put in the Hollywood spectrum of other movies many of which depict myth. For the uninformed person, it begins to feel like belief is entirely subjective and is not based on what is real, but based on whatever one feels. This subjectivism is the first step towards walking away from the Lord, because feelings come and go and cannot endure the rigors of real life.

No, we need something much more substantial and powerful to rely on and upon which to build our lives. So St. Peter in his second letter, chapter 1, verse 16 is clear about what his message did NOT rest on and about what his message DID rest on: his message by the Holy Spirit is not about “cleverly devised myths,” but rather based on eyewitness testimony. There is a gigantic difference. But before elaborating about the basis for our certainty, St. Peter states what he’s talking about: he’s talking about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ of which

he saw an astounding prelude of with his own eyes when he saw the Lord transfigured on the holy mountain.

Peter by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is teaching us why Jesus should be predominantly before us in our hearts and minds; why our Lord should be predominantly before us in the way we live and why Jesus is the basis for our illumination and transformation as the people of God. Take away the Lord Jesus and there is no faith, there is no hope, and there is no eternal life. But why should you believe in Him?! Because He has all power and because He is coming again! Remember Peter is preparing us for what will happen: “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word for “coming” is *parousia*...it is made up of *para* which means “alongside” and *ousia* which means “to be,” so *parousia* refers to when Jesus will be alongside you when He comes again in power and glory. The day is coming and you are being called to be ready for that glorious day when you will stand before the Lord of glory. That will be the single biggest day of your life. Again, we are to be ready!

But for the Lutheran Christian especially – and this was one of the most basic points of my doctoral dissertation in responding to the madness of contemporary second coming teaching – if one remains in the *constant coming* of the Lord Jesus through Word and Sacrament, then one is *always* ready for the great and glorious coming. Receive Jesus constantly through His Word and you will be ready. Then that day will not be a day you view in anxiety, but a day that you view with joy and faith-driven anticipation.

This whole dynamic reminds me of what comes up frequently in athletics: maybe you’ve heard the saying, “you perform or play like you practice.” If you practice half-heartedly, then when the day comes for the big game or competition, you will play or perform according to the way you rehearsed, but if you practice hard, then you will perform at your best. Now in removing the synergistic nuances from my analogy: if you are led to constantly receive Jesus who comes to you through Word and Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins, then guess what? Then He will make you ready for His powerful and glorious Second

Coming! Or think of it this way: if you are constantly receiving the LIGHT of God through Christ's Word and Sacrament, then the glorious LIGHT of Christ on the Last Day – though awesome and beyond description – will at the same time not be strange; at the same time you will have been trained by the lesser light (and yet still efficacious light) of the Word of Jesus before His coming...this is why we gather. We are not here to be a social club; we are not here to pat ourselves on the back because we're being "good Christians" who go to church...yuck and no thank you. We are here to remain in the forgiveness of our sins received through the Gospel and received through the body and blood of Jesus; and to receive the light of Christ through His Word...and it is this that truly makes you ready to die and to live and to see Jesus when the *parousia* takes place!

But how can you know this is true? It is true, because the Word of God does not correspond to myth, but corresponds to actual life and ordinary history. Let me mention first of all its correspondence to other truth: one of the sharpest criticisms against the saving faith is the attack against miracles. Why believe in these astounding and extraordinary events recorded in the Bible? There is a simple and logical reason: if God is real, then He may exceptionally intervene. There is no reason to bog-down this simple idea with concepts such as "suspending the laws of physics"...miracles are God's intervention in ordinary history. The laws of physics go on in accord with God's good creation, but if God is real, then special intervention is *not* nonsensical.

The greater question therefore is on the existence of God Himself. And this is the counter-challenge that we should gladly offer to anyone who believes that belief in God is unreasonable: God's existence corresponds to what we see. It is the alternative that does not.

Stephen C. Meyer in his book *Signature In The Cell* assesses the chance hypothesis since if one rejects God, then the explanation for life often defaults to the answer that is *chance* (indeed "chance" becomes a powerful "god" in this worldview). Meyer: "*the probability that even one of these information-rich molecules arose by chance, let alone the suite of such molecules necessary to*

maintain or build a minimally complex cell, is so small as to dwarf the probabilistic resources of the entire universe. The conditional probability that just one of these information-rich molecules arose by chance – in effect, the chance that chance is true – is much less than one-half. It is less than one in a trillion trillion. Thus, I concluded that it is more reasonable to reject the chance hypothesis than to accept it (222)."

Hugh Ross in his book *The Creator and the Cosmos* shares the testimony of scientist Paul Davies as he reflected on the ramifications of the degree of design in the universe...a reflection that moved Davies from promoting atheism. Davies testifies: *"[There] is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all...It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature's numbers to make the Universe...The impression of design is overwhelming (NavPress, 2001:157)."*

The alternative is chance, but chance does not correspond to what we see. Many atheists actually believe in a supremely-greater "miracle" than Christians do: they believe that all of existence didn't come from anything at all and that through the driver of chance we have what we now have. So the origins question is reduced to the answer: nothing caused everything to exist; while the development question is reduced to chance.

But these considerations pale to what we have in our text in 2nd Peter. After St. Peter gives testimony to the glorious light that he saw and the Father's voice that he heard at Christ's Transfiguration, he gets to the basis of our certainty:

2nd Peter 1:19: ***"And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,"***

There are two major Christian interpretations on what St. Peter is saying here:

- 1) Given his eyewitness experience in ordinary history of the Transfiguration, the prophetic word of God is now even *more* certain. That is to say that what St. Peter saw and heard further confirmed the Word. This is related to the general idea that as the Lord Jesus fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures, those very same Scriptures have become “more sure”.
- 2) The second interpretation is that *in-spite* of what St. Peter saw and heard first-hand at the Transfiguration, there is something even greater than his eye-witness testimony, namely the prophetic Scriptures. What is “more sure” than even what he saw with his own eyes is the very Word of God that God Himself has given to us through revelation, inspiration, and illumination.

Now let me give you the really awesome perspective about this situation: *both ideas are in accord with a real state of affairs even as the debate about precise interpretation of verse 19 continues.*

What is in Scripture is based on what the real apostles of Christ really saw and what they were really willing to die for and did die for (or for John was exiled for). That’s what you call powerful testimony to the truth. And yes, it is extremely compelling that what was predicted through prophecy came to fulfillment in Jesus! This is a miracle that one can confirm through the examination of history.

But the second interpretation of 2nd Peter 1:19 is perhaps even more compelling and Luther emphasizes that the message here is that the Lord “bids us fix our eyes and keenness of mind on the Word alone, on Baptism, on the Lord’s Supper, and on absolution, and to regard everything else as darkness. I do not understand, or care about, what is done in this world by the sons of this age...(TLSB 2163 referencing AE 8:33).”

That is dear Christian. Turn away from the darkness. Turn away from your doubt. And come to the holy mountain that today is God's Holy Church and come to the light of Christ that today is given in His Word and Sacrament! And we must confess our darkness and doubt. Your sinful nature which fights against God 24/7 completely prefers groping in the darkness of sin. You want to serve yourself and you would rather die than live...you have in the flesh the insane drive for self-destruction and of course this is what the devil wants and this is why he appeals to your sinful nature every, single day so that you would destroy yourself through substance abuse, sexually immorality, or whatever this world puts before you to keep you from the Holy Mountain of Christ's Holy Church where the Holy Savior comes to heal you, forgive you, and give you eternal life through the light of His Word and Sacrament.

You, however, are called to crucify this darkness that is in you and to come into the light. Your transfiguration is that Christ comes again through the light of His Word and Sacrament. Your transfiguration in Christ is that all of your sins are forgiven; your transfiguration in Christ is that you have been removed from the realm of death and from the realm of darkness. Now remain in the light of Christ! And this is the light of Christ – the glorious Gospel – through Jesus (the glorious Lord who is coming again) your sins are forgiven by the shedding of His blood; He died on the cross to buy you back to God as He paid for the sins of the world; and now you have life and salvation; now God is on your side; now you have hope; and this light of the Gospel is always here for you and your faith will always through this light be made more sure!