

Sermon Draft

Text: 2 Peter 1:16–21

Sermon: Transfiguration 2023

Many false religions of the world have followed this same pattern: Someone has allegedly seen his god in some sort of supernatural way. Upon this chance encounter, he immediately sets up an altar and calls that place where he “saw” god holy. Thus, in the years to follow, people would bring some sort of sacrifice to this altar in hopes that their sacrifices would be seen as a wonderful gift and their god would reappear to them.

Actually, this doesn’t sound all that outlandish to us Christians. For the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has appeared to his people. However, there is something the false religions lack. They lack the Word. One of the major differences in the false gods and the true triune God is that the true God continues to speak, apart from anything man might do. He continues to call out to his children and bless them. The true God is not sitting in some particular place waiting for someone to bring him something he likes or a sacrifice that might appease his wrath.

The true God himself has already made the one pleasing sacrifice. It was made by the Son of God, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, with whom the Lord is “*well pleased.*”

So now that true God comes to us, in places and ways very accessible to us. Here, in Jesus Christ, is where we see the true God, and Jesus reveals where the true God is in three ways: by his transfiguration, by the writings of the apostle Peter, and by the cross.

Jesus reveals where the true God is by his transfiguration. God has a history of revealing himself on mountains. Moses came face-to-face with God and heard him speak from a burning bush on Mount Horeb. The fire indicated the presence of God. Then his presence was confirmed in the Word of God.

God’s presence made this ground holy. “*Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground*” (Exodus 3:5). Why was it holy ground? God was there and said it was. He makes something holy.

Later, when Moses and Israel fled from Egypt, the glory of the Lord dwelt with them on that same mountain, also called Sinai. A thick cloud appeared over it for six days. Similar to the time Moses met God, ***“The glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire”*** (Exodus 24:16–17).

Centuries later, again on a high mountain, God in the flesh, Jesus, reveals to Peter, James, and John where God is. He was transfigured before the apostles’ eyes. His face shone like the sun. Jesus’ face shone as if it was on fire, much like the burning bush Moses saw. Jesus’ clothes were likewise bright white. A cloud also covered this mountain. There, too, the apostles could see Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus.

Moses represented the Law of God, and Elijah represented the Prophets of God. These men confirmed the Gospel of Jesus, like saying the Law and the Prophets are wrapped up in this man, Jesus.

Peter suggests, ***“If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”*** (Matthew 17:4). A tent, the tabernacle, was what God had once instructed the Israelites to build. A tabernacle is a place for the Lord to dwell with his people that he should bless them.

So, Peter was saying here that these three should all be equally revered. The voice of the Lord comes to them from the cloud. ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”*** (Matthew 17:5).

The apostles see, and then they hear. Peter hears the Father setting him straight: “Listen to him”—just Jesus, not all three. Upon hearing, the apostles immediately understand this is holy ground, and they are in the presence of the Holy One. Thus, they hit the dirt with their faces. God is telling the apostles that the Word Jesus speaks is what the Father speaks (John 8:26). What Jesus does is what the Father has ordained him to do.

Now the disciples knew that where Jesus and his Word are, there is a holy place. The Lord was there through it all. This was really a glimpse of heaven. Peter and his fellows were eyewitnesses of an awesome sight, and Jesus touched them. Essentially, he said, “Here I AM” (Yahweh)! And I AM is with them not just in Word, but also physically, touching them (Matthew 17:7). Jesus has revealed to them that the presence of God is where Jesus is. “Here I AM.”

Jesus reveals where the true God is. All this talk about the transfiguration is not some cleverly devised myth, Peter assures us (vs 16–18). No, he and James and John were eyewitnesses. They were there. They looked at Jesus and Moses and Elijah. Their testimony is true. Peter knows with certainty that Jesus indeed has made this mountain holy by being there. Matthew and Mark called it a “high mountain”; Luke called it “the mountain.” Peter proclaims it to be a “holy mountain” because he himself was there to see Jesus transfigured on it.

So, then, why not erect an altar there as the false religions do, based on the same claims of visions? Because it’s not only Jesus’ presence in visibly appearing that makes a place holy. Yes, Peter, James, and John had seen a vision. They saw the incarnate Jesus in a glorified state. They saw Moses and Elijah standing beside Jesus. They saw God. But they also heard him. “Here I AM.” They were immediately directed to Jesus’ words. They were to “listen to him.” Peter knew that where the Word of God is, there is the holiness of God. In fact, Peter writes, “*we have something more sure*” than visions: the written Scriptures of God’s inspired authors, such as Peter (vs 19–21).

Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, moved Peter to write all this about the presence and glory of God in Christ Jesus himself. We need not visit some holy mountain, some Mecca in order to have the true God revealed to us. Jesus reveals the true God to us wherever the Scriptures of Peter or Matthew or Moses or Paul are read or heard.

Jesus reveals where the true God is by his cross. As Peter and the apostles were descending the mountain with Jesus, he told them where the transfiguration was headed (Matthew 17:9). Jesus instructed them in the way they would all go; they would follow Jesus in the way of the cross. Jesus had come into the world for this. The true God, the Word, became flesh specifically in order to suffer and die. He would have to be counted a sinner so we could be counted as holy ones.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, the apostles preached this, preached so that we could hear: Hear that the cross of wood that Jesus made bloody with his own blood was made so on account of our sin. Hear that there is now a mountain yet more holy, Calvary, because the holy one of God was hung there on that cross.

Peter tells us not to follow cunningly devised myths, but to repent of our sins and receive this holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death of Jesus' cross for our forgiveness. He is here for the forgiveness of our sins precisely where he has promised to be, where he promises to deliver his cross to us and us to his cross.

It's still as God spoke to the Israelites from the holy mountain and said, "*Here I AM, in the Holy of Holies for you.*" In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he comes with his cross to us and for us. "Here I AM." He has promised to be there for us in the waters of Holy Baptism.

In Christ's word of forgiveness preached, in Holy Absolution applied, we have that same forgiveness of the cross. Jesus reveals the true God to us wherever his Word and Sacraments bring us to his cross.

Peter is pointing us to where we can know the true God. Moses and the Prophets of old had always testified that the place to look is the one and only Jesus Christ. That was confirmed to Peter in the transfiguration of our Lord, where he saw and heard the Son of God, veiled in the flesh of man: "Here I AM."

Now, today, we see and hear the true God in this same Jesus in the Holy Word of Scripture and in the Sacraments. The true God is here, preached and veiled in the bread and wine, as he came to save the world by his death on the cross. “Here he is,” the One, for the forgiveness of our sins. In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen