**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Jesus Only”**

Rev. David K. Groth

February 11, 2024

“And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only” (Mk. 9:8).

What famous people have you met? In 1977, the NBA All-Star game was held in Milwaukee. They were staying downtown at the Pfister hotel and as they were checking in after practice, my brothers and I were in the lobby with paper and pen to get autographs. Trouble is, as an 11-year-old who didn’t watch basketball, I didn’t know these guys. So my strategy was to go up to every tall guy I saw and ask for their autograph. It worked pretty well . . . until one of them, a very tall and big man, towering over me, and fairly annoyed, looked down and said, “Kid, you already have my autograph.” I wish I could tell you who it was.

What famous people have you met? Were you nervous? Did you say anything you regretted? Some fans, wanting to make a memorable impression make over-the-top statements about how the celebrity changed their lives, or even saved their lives. Some ask prying questions into their private lives.

In our text, Peter is awestruck by the company he’s in, and in all that excitement he does what many do: he prattles at the mouth.

 Jesus has led Peter, James, and John up a tall mountain. Mark says Jesus was transfigured before them. The root of the word is the same for our word metamorphosis, a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Mark says the clothes of Jesus became radiant, intensely white. It sounds like Psalm 104 which says God wears light like a garment (vv. 1-2).

 Moses and Elijah (long dead) are both there, talking with Jesus. For forty years Moses led God’s grumbling, doubting, and fearful people in the wilderness. Moses’ leadership was constantly questioned, and often rejected. Surely, he would have something to say to Jesus whose messianic leadership is about to be questioned and rejected in the ultimate way.

 And there was Elijah. He also had much in common with Jesus. Both were prophets. Elijah raised a young man from the dead. So did Jesus. Elijah traded barbs with the priests of Baal in a showdown. And in a different showdown, Jesus traded Scripture verses with the devil. Elijah could also identify with the loneliness of Jesus. At one time Elijah felt he was the only faithful one left, running for his life, mostly abandoned by God. Soon, Jesus, on the cross, would feel very much alone, forsaken by men and even by the Father.

We are not told what Moses and Elijah said to Jesus. Luke says they were talking about the death that Jesus is soon going to experience (9:31). Maybe Moses and Elijah were appealing to the human-nature of Jesus, encouraging Him, assuring Him the victory He had come to win would soon be the reality.

Peter, James and John could only stand there slack jawed, watching the two most famous people in their nation’s history speak to their Rabbi, as if they were old friends . . . which of course, they were. Excitedly, Peter blurts out, “Let’s make three tents, one for each of you!”

What in the world did he mean by that? It sounds like Peter wanted all three of them to stick around for a while on the top of that mountain so that the six of them could get to know one another on a more personal level. But it also sounds like he was putting Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. Does Peter think Jesus is just another religious leader or prophet?

That’s where many are today. They get long-winded as they judge Jesus to have been a brilliant moralist, an insightful philosopher, and all-around nice guy. They chatter on and on and say all sorts of nice things about Jesus, but they leave out the most important things . . .because they have no faith. In their minds, Jesus is just another high-level teacher, one of many the world has produced. And Jesus can be no more than that for them. What they need more than anything is not another teacher, but a Savior from sin; not another moralist but a substitutionary Lamb who was sacrificed for them. Not another all-around nice guy but the Lord of life and light. Their unbelief, however, will not allow Jesus to be their Savior or Lord.

Scripture does not say how long the three were talking with one another. We only know it ended when a cloud covered the trio. From within the cloud came a voice, the voice of the Father. He spoke to the followers of Jesus (that’s you and me too) and gave them some advice . . . a command actually. “This is My beloved Son” the Father says. “Listen to Him.” That is, He’s not just one of the three; He’s the very Son of God. He’s not just a prophet or teacher; He’s the great I Am, the long-awaited Messiah.

Next verse, “And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.” Jesus only. Moses and Elijah are gone. The cloud is gone. All is quiet. You get the sense they are disappointed. They see Jesus only. His face no longer shines like the sun; his clothes are no longer radiant. They’d just glimpsed the glory of God, a peak *beyond* His humanity. But now it’s the same ole’ Jesus: Jesus only. No longer the breathtaking butterfly; back to the homely caterpillar.

Jesus starts leading them down from the mountain, where there are crowds of very sick people to attend to, disciples to teach, and a cross to die on. On the way, he charges them not to tell anyone what they had seen, not until he has risen from the dead.

There’s that talk of death again! They hate it when he does that. That’s not part of *their* plan for Jesus. But this was God’s plan, in place since before the foundation of the world. Why? God in His glory cannot be near sinful men without the sinful men being incinerated. Therefore, Jesus covered Himself in human flesh so we could approach him . . . more than that, so we could even pin him to a cross.

They had no idea who they were crucifying. Martin Luther once said that just as the worm covers the fishing hook and hides the hook from the fish’s eye, so the humanity of Christ covered His deity and hid it from people’s eyes. Peter, James, and John have only the worm to look at now. Makes me think of Psalm 22, “I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people” (v. 6). Unlike so many of the celebrities today, Isaiah reminds us Jesus “had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Is. 53). Instead, “he was despised and rejected by men.” Unlike those today around whom people flock to get a selfie, Jesus was “as one from whom men *hide* their faces. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

But He’s your Savior, and nothing less than that. He said things a good teacher would never say, such as “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

He said things a good philosopher would never say, such as responding to the temptations of the devil by quoting Scripture rather than appealing to reason and evidence (Mt. 4).

He said things nice guys would never say, such as “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children . . . he cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:26).

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!” There is so much noise pollution in your life, so many other voices all clamoring for your attention. Realize, most of them don’t care one whit about you. They just want your vote, or they want you to follow them on social media or listen to their podcasts or buy the products they endorse. But behind all that noise, there is a still, small voice: the quiet voice of Jesus only. The voice of Him who wants only what is best for *you*.

You may feel like you know celebrities and famous athletes, but they don’t know you from Adam, and they don’t care to either. They mostly want you to leave them alone. But Jesus cares for you. He knows you, everything about you. And He wants you to know Him better too. And He doesn’t want you to leave Him alone. He promises to listen to you whenever you call on Him. . . even in the middle of the night . . . to answer you when you ask Him. He has gifts for you, plans for you (Jer. 29:11). He wants to be with you forever.

Jesus came not to incinerate us with His glory, but to save us with His humiliation. Listen to Him, because He has the words of eternal life. No one else does. Only Jesus. Listen to Him, because His thoughts are not your thoughts (Is. 55:8). You won’t get the words of eternal life any other way. Moreover, “faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

Troubled by your sin? Listen to Him because just about every week He says through one of His ministers, “I forgive you all your sins.”

Are you baptized? Listen to Him then when He promises “he that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16).

Do you believe His words? Listen to Him, “Whoever hears my words and believes has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).

Do you understand that at this altar, you will eat and drink the Lord’s body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine? Listen to Him then, because He says, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:54).

Do you see Jesus as more than just a prophet, or teacher, or philosopher, or nice guy? Listen to Him, for His Word promises, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

Others can have all the celebrities, all the famous athletes, all their autographs and high fashion and bling . . . and all their drama too, their finicky demands, their narcissistic fussiness and hypocrisy. But give me Jesus. Give us Jesus. Jesus only, especially on the cross of Calvary. Amen.