

A Lamp Shining in a Dark Place II Peter 1:16-21

Let me begin with a little bit of a disclaimer. What a wonderful way to begin a message, isn't it? The disclaimer is that how I begin this sermon is not complaining, it is the reality of what goes on in my mind and in the context of each week. I am not going to say this so that you might have a different understanding about my life, but that in our time this morning, that you might have a greater understanding of scripture. It is not about how I prepare or how I feel at the beginning that makes the difference. Where the difference will come, hopefully for you, is how you feel about God and God's Word at the end of the message. That is the final and ultimate hope that I have for you this morning.

Peter's job was to continually remind them of the things of God and what Jesus was all about. Isn't that we are called to do each week? In the midst of our difficult weeks – the times when life catches up with us and knocks the air out of sails – we are reminded to remember Jesus. Listen again to what Peter says in verses 12 and again in 15. **“12 - Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things (God's divine power). 15 – And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”** But why was Peter so adamant about telling the story over and over again?

One of the things that get me as a preacher is that the Church calendar is the same every year. You begin the year with the baptism of the Lord. Then there is Transfiguration Sunday. Directly after that there is the season of Lent, followed by Pentecost, and towards the end of the year, we have Advent. With the cycle of the lectionary, a person can preach through the lectionary every three years. So what that means is that on special Sundays like today, Transfiguration Sunday, over a period of your time in the church, you have heard everything that there is to hear about this event or I have preached everything that I have come up with over a period of 17 years. Please do not hear me as complaining about Sunday, but in reality, if we don't grow, we can become stale in what we preach, or study, or hear.

I think that I have found the difference today. Imagine if you will, and this is hard for me to say, what it would have been like to be in Bramlage Coliseum Wednesday

evening. If you are not familiar with this site, it is the basketball arena for Kansas State. But, you were not able to be in the arena. You had to be outside of the arena, listening to all that was going on inside. Or maybe you had to work and could not listen to the game or watch it later on a recorded tape. How was it hearing about the game from someone who was outside of the arena or even from someone who was in the gym watching the game? Don't you think that many of those coming out after the game would have told those in the surrounding area about how great the game was? Can't you imagine that even though you were outside, you would have claimed to be there? You heard about it, you experienced it in some degree, but yet, it wasn't the same as actually seeing the game right before your eyes! There is nothing like being there!

That is what I have felt about this passage. This is Transfiguration Sunday. This is the day of the Church calendar when we remember the time when Jesus went up the mountain and was transformed before the eyes of the disciples. In the presence of Jesus were also Elijah and Moses. I have preached from the passage in Matthew, Mark and Luke over the past 17 years, but have never preached out of this passage. Why should I? The gospels are the stories of Jesus life. They are the accounts of what happened as he walked this earth. I always liked the Matthew passage more because Matthew was one of the disciples who would have been there on that mountain with Jesus. Mark and Luke would have had to listen to someone else and write down what they had heard and seen.

But then it hit me. Matthew would have been like someone waiting outside of Bramlage Coliseum. He would have not been one who actually saw the event, but would have been one of the first to hear about it. If you read in the accounts of the gospels, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and traveled up the mountain. The other disciples were left at the bottom of the mountain to wait upon the Lord. They might have seen the cloud, they might have heard the voice, but they were not there as Peter was.

That conviction of being in the presence of Jesus when he was transfigured is what I hear coming out in Peter's words today. There is an urgency in his words that remind the people that they need to listen to this. They need to do more than hear the words, they need to let the words guide them in their lives. That is why Peter says I

intend to keep on reminding you...I will make every effort for you to remember these words. What Peter saw made an impact on his life. He wanted everyone to hear and remember what he saw.

That is why Peter asked them not to follow clever myths or false teachings. He is telling them truth, truth that he saw, not something that was told to him. And it was not just something that happened, it was power! It was power that changed Jesus right before his eyes. It was the voice of God reaffirming who Jesus was and why he was there. It is the words that God said that we need to hear this morning as well.

There on that mountain top with Jesus, Peter saw him change. He saw him μεταμορφωθη (metamorphutha). This is where we get our word metamorphosis. By definition that is: to change substance by supernatural means. It is there that Peter heard God call Jesus, again, his Son, the Beloved in whom God was well pleased. Peter said, an eyewitness, that Jesus received honor and glory from God. The change was that God bestowed upon Jesus the receptor of our honor and glory.

Those words might bring different ideas to different people, but what God was saying is that Jesus is to be in the highest esteem (honor) of those who follow him and that we are to glory (praise) Jesus. The Greek word for glory is doxa (δοξαν) which is the beginning of our word for doxology. We are to – praise God from whom all blessings flow. As we talked about last week, that is even in the difficult times that we are to praise God. And it is exactly for that reason that I feel Peter is so adamant in sharing his eyewitness account with us. He of all people understand that there are times that we won't feel like praising God, but he says that it is exactly in times like these that we praise God through Jesus even more. Why – because Peter saw the change that comes through Christ. The change may be a metamorphosis or it may be a change of the heart. It may be a change of emotions or it may be a change of scenery. God has the power to change your life with supernatural powers!

Peter goes on to say that the prophets told of the day when one would come who would be the leader for his people. The prophets told of what we could expect and the people waited with eager anticipation for it to happen. So now that Peter had seen it with his own eyes, why would they not believe it? In his words, you should be running to this as if it were the only light in a dark place.

Think about that analogy. Think of your back porch in the summer. It is late at night and there is not a light on in the entire neighborhood. You decide to turn on your outside light. Wait for a few minutes and what do you see? Probably every moth or late night insect flying around your light. They are attracted to the light for some peculiar reason. I am sure there is a reason, but I don't have it today. Or how about this! If you are ever in a crowded place with no windows and the electricity goes off, be the only person with a small light and see what happens. I would bet that you are going to be surrounded by many people or even asked to use your light to find a solution to the problem or maybe even to find a way out.

Martin Luther tells how "when sorely vexed by my own sinfulness, by the wickedness of the world and by the dangers that beset the Church," he had fallen into a state of utter hopelessness and depression, and went about the house mourning and dejected. Seeing his wife all dressed in black, he asked the reason. "Do you not know," she said, "God in heaven is dead." He looked at her in amazement. "What nonsense!" Luther said. "How can God die? He is immortal and will live through all eternity."

"And yet," his wife Kathryn said, "you go about hopeless and discouraged." Luther had realized that even in the most sorrowful times in our lives, we still have a God who is more powerful and more alive than anything that comes at us in this life. A God who gave us his Son to become the focus of our glory and honor. Jesus becomes that light in the dark place that we are to follow. Jesus gives us that way out, that comfort in the darkness, that ability to bring change when we seem too afraid to move. That is Jesus.

On that mountain when Peter was an eyewitness to Jesus' transformation, it changed Peter as well to the point that he gave his life that others might know the story. Not just the story of the appearance of Jesus, but the change that occurs in us when our energy is focused on giving Jesus the highest esteem within our lives and praising Jesus even when the world looks the darkest. For Jesus is the light that leads us out of the darkness into a day filled with hope and wholeness. Jesus is our lamp shining in a dark place.