

Sermon for Transfiguration

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, 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, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:16 – 21

"We were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty." The apostle Peter wants to protect the story of Christ from being confused with made up stories, with mythological gods or superheroes, who are nothing more than a reflection of human thoughts and hopes: this idea that there need to be figures who are free from guilt and death, or if they must die, their death should only be a passage to true life. Figures to whom the whole truth is revealed and who bring light into our dark existence. And from this "there needs to be" comes the conclusion that it is so. Stories are told of gods without fault and deities who die, but always come back—an existence without beginning and without end. A cycle as we see in nature, but on a higher level, so to speak.

However, no one may ask when or where such stories of gods and superheroes actually took place. No time or place can be named. The myth exists in all times and places. It wants to capture the imagination of everything human beings experience, suffer, and hope in order to bring us some kind of comfort. But there is no comfort in stories that have no basis or foundation in reality. In the end, "all times and places" dissolves into "nowhere and never."

In contrast Peter says, "we were with Him on the holy mountain," and there we saw Him shining in the light and power and glory of God. And it wasn't just in a very specific place, namely Mount Tabor, but it was also at a very specific time: six days after Peter confessed in Caesarea Philippi, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Matthew 16:16

The when and where is recorded exactly. There is no mythological "sometime/never" or "somewhere/nowhere," but rather a solid and certain "then and there." God reveals Himself and acts in history, not in stories arising out of human dreams. In the history of Jesus Christ, God has made Himself visible and audible: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." This One comes from my being and expresses my heart. He is like you in all things, except without sin. He belongs to me from eternity, is my perfect image, my love and joy, since before the world began.

And what you heard through my Word, through the voice from heaven, should allow your eyes to see for at least a moment, how this Jesus shines in celestial brilliance, how Moses and Elijah speak with Him and bow before Him, how the clarity of God transfigures, surrounds and permeates Him!

What Simon Peter, James and John experienced on Mount Tabor, what they heard about Jesus and saw in Him, was completely unexpected. They never dreamed of it or counted on it. It wasn't a psychogenic experience, where the human soul wishes for something with all its might, and under the right circumstances sees and hears it, as if it were really there. It appears within reach, but it is

like another form of reality. It is just a nice dream, a fascinating experience, that the soul creates for itself.

No, what the disciples saw and heard was an act of God and the voice of God. “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty,” Peter says. And John, who was also there with Peter on Mount Tabor, writes words, which also attest to Peter’s witness: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

No, the apostles didn’t fantasize the Transfiguration of Jesus. They were allowed to see how God made their master glorious.

We can trust the witness of the apostles: we have seen, and we have heard. In life, as in death, we can firmly believe that we have a glorious, strong, eternal, living Savior and Redeemer, who remembers us and loves us.

Besides his own apostolic eyewitness and ear witness, the apostle Peter refers also to the prophetic witness of the Old Testament, which points to the story of Christ. In Jesus Christ all has been fulfilled. “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, 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.”

2 Peter 1:19

Prophets and Psalmists didn’t just make up what they wrote about the coming salvation of God and the Savior. God’s Spirit gave the words to them, in order to keep expectation and hope alive in Israel.

And why should we—after most of the prophecies have already been fulfilled in Christ—still continue to pay attention to the prophetic Word, as a light shining in a dark place?

When we hold up the prophecies next to the story of Christ, a light goes on, showing us just how faithful and true our gracious God is.

For example, in the great prophecy of the Suffering Servant, Isaiah 53, comes the hard to believe announcement: God’s Son, the Messiah, will take on the form of a servant. Israel will despise Him and reject Him. He will suffer like a lamb led to the slaughter, patiently and willingly. He will give His life as an offering for guilt. And then God will tear Him out of night and death. “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11

And why does the Son give Himself over as a servant and an offering? Why does God want Him to take this path into the deepest of depths?

Amazingly, the prophet saw the mystery of the substitution: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:4ff

This prophecy was so audacious, that one might well have asked at that time, if God was crazy enough to not judge the sinners, but rather to judge the Son, the only holy and righteous one, in our place? And when the Messiah comes, will He want to take this path, into the depths of rejection and death? Will He only serve to hand Himself over?

Jesus said, "Yes," to Isaiah 53 and fulfilled everything. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

Jesus confirmed the prophetic Word by His actions. In His Passion, God's eternally strong, saving love shines bright. And if one hears or reads Isaiah 53 in addition, then the light of God's faithfulness and truth is illuminated. God stands by His Word. He does what He says.

So the prophetic Word of the Old Testament is still a holy comfort and bright light of God for us. Sometimes when we think about things in our lives, they weigh heavy on our hearts. How can I cope with this burden? How can I stand before God with my guilt? Then I hear Isaiah 53 and fix my eyes on the picture of the crucified Christ, and the morning star of faith and hope rises in my dark heart: He was pierced also for my transgressions and crushed for my iniquities. Jesus Christ is my peace. By His wounds I am healed and free. God keeps His Word of grace and love also for me in eternal faithfulness. He fulfills that which is still to be done: "until the day dawns," the great day of God, the day of fulfillment—the complete victory of righteousness, of freedom, of life in the light, the coming home for all of God's children to the Father forever. That is the will of our Savior who loves us, who has redeemed us and who has promised, "I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am." John 17:24

Praise be to Jesus Christ forever. Amen.