



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Transfiguration

**Jesus
establishes
His church -
Part 1**

**Jesus
establishes
His church -
Part 2**

**On the road
to Emmaus**

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2016

March

Session 1 – Transfiguration

Welcome. As we move toward Passion week and the celebration of Jesus' resurrection and triumph over death, this week we will focus on the amazing moment of the transfiguration. The story of the transfiguration is provided to us in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is important for us to take into account what each of the Gospel writers wrote as we study this event.

The story of the transfiguration began about a week before the actual event when Jesus said to His disciples that "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). The Bible doesn't give us a report on how this promise made the disciples feel or whether or not they understood what Jesus was saying. We understand now as we look back on this event that the transfiguration was the fulfillment of this promise. Listen to Peter's words in 2 Peter 1:16-18:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Let's now zero in on the transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were invited to go up the mountain with Jesus to pray. As Jesus was praying His appearance changed. His face "shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light." Then Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah and they began conversing about His departure. These two Old Testament characters represented the law and the prophets respectively.

Pausing for a second, we can imagine how amazing this moment was for the three disciples. Yet, Luke writes that "Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep." How could that be? Perhaps leaving the group with Jesus to go and pray had become routine and they weren't anticipating anything incredible to happen. For us today, if we were given the opportunity to pray with the Lord Jesus or hear Him speak, for sure we would be at full attention. Divine services are the opportunity for divine encounter. Is that how we approach the divine services and the opportunities we have to hear His word? Do we step into the congregation with the feeling that our God could do something incredible today? Or have the divine services just become a part of our routine? Ask yourself, where has the activity of God become routine in my life to the extent that I've become complacent?

Continuing the story, Luke wrote that when the disciples were "fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him." Peter chooses this time to speak and tells Jesus that it is good for them to be there and that he will build a tabernacle for each of the distinguished guests. Perhaps this indicates that he wanted the Old Testament visitors and Jesus to prolong their stay. Perhaps he wanted to prolong this event because he didn't realize something great was about to happen in the very near future. This can be seen as simply Peter being too small for the moment but feeling compelled to say or do something. He had yet to see and understand what was being shown to them. Do we sometimes fall into the same trap? When we find ourselves in a good place, do we wish to stay there instead of looking for what God will do next? Or instead of waiting for God to show us all He wants us to see, we try to jump ahead of Him. Don't be afraid to wait on the Lord with patience and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you when it is time to move.

Continuing with Matthew's account:

"While he (Peter) was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Matthew 17:5

The cloud is a symbol for the divine presence and it envelops each of the participants, bringing them into the radiance of divine power and glory. The statement made by the voice is similar to the statement made at the time of Jesus' baptism, except this time God adds the command, "Hear Him," which is meant for the witnesses, both living and dead. Here God is telling them that Jesus is the Son of God and that Jesus is the new prophet that would lead a new group of people into salvation, just as Moses led the nation of Israel. As a revealer of God's will, Jesus had much to teach the disciples about God's plan and the disciples needed to listen. The same holds true for us today as disciples of Jesus.

After the voice, the cloud was gone and only Jesus remained with the disciples. As they walked back down the mountain, Jesus instructed them to "tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." This instruction of silence was to benefit Peter, James, and John as they would not be able to fully understand what they had witnessed until after Jesus had resurrected from the dead. How often would some moments of silence benefit us as we try to understand how God is working in our lives?

Both Matthew and Mark conclude the episode in their Gospels with the disciples asking Jesus a question born out of their knowledge of the Old Testament prophet, Malachi. As you may recall from a service during Advent, the disciples ask Jesus why the prophet wrote that Elijah had to come again before the Messiah would appear. Jesus informed them that Elijah had come in the person of John the Baptist who had ministered in the spirit and the power of Elijah in preparing the way for Him. Jesus also told them that He would not be recognized by the people and that He would suffer just like John the Baptist did. Let this conclusion of the story serve to inspire us to keep moving forward in our pursuit of knowledge. The disciples had witnessed something great and they still felt the need to ask questions. Never lose your desire to keep learning about Jesus.

The transfiguration was a great moment of preparation for Jesus and His disciples. Jesus was preparing to make His sacrifice to redeem mankind and His disciples were being prepared to carry His mission to the world. What may have been thought to be just a routine time of prayer turned into an amazing, life-changing experience for the disciples. Our God is still doing amazing things today. Let's keep our eyes on Him and prepare ourselves to do our part in His great work.

Session 2 – Jesus establishes His church (Part 1)

Welcome back. We are drawing closer to Holy Week, and the holy days of Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter, the time when Jesus Christ's victory was won. In this session we will explore how Jesus laid the foundation for the further progression of God's plan of salvation after His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus Christ was sent to earth by God, and was given the authority, sanctification and blessing sufficient to redeem mankind and give them eternal life. We read in John 17, Jesus' "high priestly" prayer: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him [Jesus Christ] authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him."

Jesus had inner authority. He knew His purpose and lived for it. He carried it out perfectly. When He began His ministry, He gathered disciples - men who would walk with Him, learn from Him, and, after His ascension, carry on with God's plan of salvation. Those disciples didn't always understand who Jesus was, why He had been sent, or how He would accomplish what He had been sent to do. Nor did they always understand what they were called, equipped, and then sent to do. Gradually, incrementally, their understanding grew. It is the same for us. We are to continually growing in our understanding of God's plan of salvation and our purpose in it.

Jesus Christ knew that His time on earth was limited. He knew that His sinless life, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension were absolutely essential to God's plan of salvation, but those victories alone would not complete it. Jesus Christ knew that after His ascension, there must be a mechanism through which human beings could gain access to the eternal life that His victory offered. That mechanism would be the church of Jesus Christ.

So while on earth and exercising the authority given Him, Jesus promised to establish His church, and to give the church a ministry. "And I [Jesus] also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." His church would be the mechanism that would convey His Gospel message, dispense sacraments of salvation, make disciples of Christ, and assemble believers to praise and worship God.

His promise to establish His church was fulfilled on Pentecost, and it has continued to exist without interruption to this day.

The church that Jesus established has a dual aspect, just like Jesus Christ Himself. He is true God and true Man. To some, His humanity was more apparent than His divinity. The invisible aspect of the church of Christ is that which is divine. The visible aspect of His church is that which is done by human beings.

Jesus gave one ministry to His church to enable it to carry out its purpose – the Apostle ministry. The word apostle is a derivation of the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "one who is sent." Ministry also has a dual aspect. There is the ministry, which is God-given, invisible, and perfect. Then there are the human beings who occupy the ministry, who are God-chosen, visible, and imperfect.

Jesus gave direction to the Apostles regarding how they were to lead His church. He gave the "great commission" to the ministry [Matthew 28:16-20]. Jesus delegated some of His authority to the Apostle ministry, again in order to carry out the purpose of His church, as it says in John 20: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you...If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." [John 20:21-23] He promised the ministry the help of the Holy Spirit in a very special way. In John 16: 12-15, we read, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

What is the role of the Apostle ministry in the church of Jesus Christ? Let's examine some biblical statements.

The apostle ministry is...

To be the ministry of reconciliation, and ambassadors for Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

To proclaim forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. (John 20: 23)

To baptize in the name of the triune God. (Matthew 28:19)

To consecrate and dispense Holy Communion. (Luke 22:14-20)

To dispense the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-18)

To be stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

To fight against heresies. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 1 John 4:1-6)

To prepare the bride of Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

All of this work is needed today in the church of Jesus Christ to keep God's plan of salvation moving forward. Let us join the apostles in advancing this mission, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Next week we'll dive deeper into our discussion about the apostle ministry.

Session 3 – Jesus establishes His church (Part 2)

Hello again! Last week we delved into how Jesus set up the church and the apostle ministry on earth to continue the mission He gave. We also briefly discussed the responsibilities of the ministry. The apostles are proof of the ministry Christ established to the congregation and the congregation is evidence of the apostle ministry to the world. Today we're going to discuss how the apostle ministry is evident through our actions as Christians.

Apostle Paul was not one of the original 12 apostles. During his ministry, there were many who doubted that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. What proof did Apostle Paul offer of his apostleship?

To the congregations he boldly asserted that he was an apostle. Eleven of his letters included in the New Testament begin with a reference to him, Paul, as being an apostle of Jesus Christ.

But he also told the congregations that they were the evidence of his apostleship. "If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 9:2

It is the same today. We can talk about the apostle ministry being the only ministry Jesus established for His church. We can rebut arguments that the apostle ministry was given to and intended for the early church only, or that to be an apostle one had to see the resurrected Christ. But discussions like that can soon devolve from testifying to "testifighting". The real evidence of the present day occupation of the apostle ministry must be in our congregations.

Let's consider these remarks from Chief Apostle Schneider:

Recently in a message to the apostles, the Chief Apostle outlined a responsibility: "As children of God, we have the commission to draw mankind's attention to the fact that living Apostles are at work today."

In 2 Corinthians 3 we read how Apostle Paul wrote to the congregation of how they became evidence of his work: *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.* (cf. 2 Corinthians 3: 1-3). When the apostles accept this responsibility and truly represent Christ, the Church becomes evidence of the importance and the effectiveness of this ministry.

Chief Apostle Schneider continued to say:

"Let us focus on the commission of the apostolate, as Paul described it: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 20).

"It is for us [the congregation] to prove that the apostles truly have the power to proclaim the forgiveness of sins! Let us show the world that New Apostolic Christians:

- are willing to reassess and are committed to change;
- are willing to forgive and reconcile;
- are committed to oneness.

"Such behavior earns us God's blessing and arouses interest of the apostolate in our contemporaries."

In these quotes we find characteristics of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. These characteristics must be visible in our lives, and we must grow and develop them as we become more like Christ. Our discipleship in Him, shown to the world through our actions, is evidence of the importance and effectiveness of the apostle ministry to those around us. We reflect Christ to the world as we continually align our lives to Him, demonstrating His love and offer of salvation to all.

Session 4: On the road to Emmaus

In the divine services this month we've heard a lot about the passion of Jesus Christ and His role in the history of salvation. Now that we have celebrated Easter and Christ's victory over death, let's look at the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Here we can see how an encounter with the resurrected Christ causes the disciples' hearts to stir.

When Jesus first approached the disciples on the road, Luke 24 says their *"eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him."* Jesus constrained them from knowing who He was, but if He had wanted the disciples to recognize Him right away, then He could've made that happen. As the three of them walked, the disciples were given the chance to let out everything that was on their mind concerning the events of the past few days. Jesus reassured and reminded them of Scripture and the prophecies concerning His life, death, and resurrection. The disciples later admit in verse 32 that their hearts burned as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, even though they did not know Him at that moment as their Teacher and Savior. They were touched and influenced by Scripture and the explanation given to them, even though they did not know it was Jesus who offered the explanation. Jesus knew that He would return to His Father, and so the disciples would have to grow accustomed to not having Jesus physically around to inspire them when they needed it. It's also possible that if the disciples had recognized Jesus when He approached them, they may not have spoken of their concerns so directly. Jesus spoke rather firmly with them – He called them fools for not believing in the prophecies regarding His death and resurrection. This also made the disciples' hearts burn, for their doubt was revealed and they realized their misconduct. Through Jesus' unfolding of Scripture, He is able to offer the disciples both grace and truth.

Jesus is also not physically with us on the earth right now. However, we do have the ability every week to hear God's word in divine services. When you are sitting in the pew on Sunday, do you see the minister serving and realize that through him, God is speaking to you? Do His words inspire you and cause your heart to stir so that you feel His presence? When a service is very truthful to you in revealing your own sins and misconduct, do you also experience a burning in your heart that causes you to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God?

It's amazing how God knows exactly what we need at any given moment in our lives and how to give us clarity when it is necessary. Sometimes we need to hear the comforting words of a song we like; sometimes we need a new perspective of something familiar to us so that a problem can become understandable to us. When Jesus spoke to the disciples on their journey to Emmaus, He spoke intentionally with them about Scripture and the prophecies concerning Him, with which they were familiar, but He was able to give them a new perspective. This new perspective put everything into context for the disciples so that they could make sense of what had just happened with Jesus' death and resurrection. This is what rekindled the fire in their hearts for Christ. Realizing that when something is familiar to us we might overlook the obvious aspects about it, we can understand how the disciples might have felt when Jesus spoke to them of the prophecies concerning Himself. The disciples left Jerusalem because they doubted Jesus' rising from the dead; they were confused and possibly felt alone because Jesus was no longer with them. How astounding then for the disciples to be reminded and be given clarity about Christ's role in God's plan of salvation through His death and resurrection; and even more miraculous when they discovered that it was the risen Christ who gave them the inspiration they clearly

needed. Seeking God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we too can have the inspiration and clarity we need in moments of doubt and confusion.

The two disciples were renewed after their experience with Jesus on the way to Emmaus and when they broke bread with Him. They recognized Christ in His breaking of the bread. Similarly, do we recognize Christ in the consecrated wafer we receive at communion? The disciples' hearts burned with the light of Christ after this realization, and they were so excited that they left for Jerusalem that same hour so they could share their joy with the other disciples. Instead of staying in Emmaus, they went back to where they belonged, where God wanted them to be, with the other disciples in Jerusalem.

When we have an encounter with Christ, we are put back on the path that God calls us to be on. This experience, like the disciples, is something we need to share with others. If our hearts burn for Christ, we can't keep it to ourselves. We are moved to give that light to others so that they may also come to know Him. We desire and are called to share the promise of salvation with all. The next time you feel Christ's love stir in your heart, tell someone – it may inspire them to be open to their own encounter with Christ.