



May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Mountain tops are pretty exciting. Literally and figuratively, it is a high point in life. I've climbed a few, even right here in Arizona. Camelback, I hiked with my wife on our honeymoon back in 2009. 20 something years ago I did Picacho Peak a couple of times with some family. I've hiked up mountains in Colorado, Alberta, Canada and even Machu Picchu in Peru. I've also been to the top figuratively like my wedding day, the birth of my kids, finishing the training for pastoral ministry at our Seminary, ordination and installations in ministry, and such. Have you been to the top? Literally on a mountain peak or figuratively at the high points in life, these moments are memorable, powerful, and important. It is always good to be standing on top.

During the Epiphany season, there are some moments like that. Remember standing on the banks of the Jordan River as Jesus was coming up out of the water with the Hoy Spirit in the form of a dove coming down on him and the voice of God the Father booming from heaven, "***This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.***" That's a big moment.

Didn't you also stand on that road to Damascus, seeing the Lord change Saul? That's a big moment. The gospel has the power to call a murderous persecutor of Christians out of that darkness into the light of Christ, to become a preacher of the gospel.

Then, Jesus went up on a mountainside to preach a lot of things that are good for us to hear. Do you want to know what a blessed life is? It probably surprised you to hear what Jesus said a couple of weeks ago. Basically, lots of things we think are bleak or bad, Jesus calls good for us, a blessing.

I would say, that even though these are not the most exciting, most popular spots that people would normally stop to see Jesus, he has definitely shown us why it was good to take a minute at each one of those places and stay for a while, to see and hear the Son of God reveal himself.

And now we've made it here. Today is definitely one of those high points, literally, on the mount of Jesus' Transfiguration. And I think we would agree with Peter, "***It is good for us to be here.***" This kind of glory, this kind of divine power isn't unleashed in front of people that often. Moses (and to some extent, the people of Israel) got a glimpse, for sure, at the top of a different mountain in the Old Testament, Mt. Sinai. There God came with his glory to give the Ten Commandments. Elijah got a glimpse, for sure, at the top of a different mountain in the Old Testament, Mt. Carmel. There God sent fire from heaven to burn up a water-soaked sacrifice and an altar to show the rebellious Israelites and 450 prophets of the false god, Baal, who he was, that if you are looking for God, then he is truly the only one.

But this type of glory isn't seen all that often. And maybe we get to thinking that if God would only do this kind of thing more, then we would trust him better. We'd say, "I don't have to be afraid of these terrible things that are happening. Look at how powerful my God is. He can certainly take care of me." Or maybe it's easy to think that if God would put this kind of glory on display more often then maybe other people in this world would stop their nonsense. "We just need more glory, more power, more visible displays that can rattle people in their boots and shake them to their core. Then, they wouldn't go off and do these awful things."

But is that the way it works? Just think for a second with me about Moses and the people of Israel, about Elijah and the people of Israel, and even Peter, who was standing right there with Jesus. Do you remember what happened to these people after they got to these mountaintop moments and saw God's glory?

The people of Israel camped at the base of Mt. Sinai built a golden calf. It was only 40 days. That's all it took for them to think that the glory of God on Mt. Sinai wasn't good enough and that they needed something better. After that little stunt, they belly-ached their way through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness because they kept forgetting or ignoring God. What happened on Mt. Sinai was somehow old news.

Right after God helped Elijah to win the showdown against the 450 prophets of the false god, Baal, he got frightened by the threats of wicked Queen Jezebel. Yup, he saw what God did on Mt. Carmel, and less than a couple days later, a nasty queen had him wishing he was dead.

Peter saw Jesus light up like the sun. He heard God once again announce who Jesus is. He heard Jesus say, "Wait until after all the work of your salvation is done, after I rise from the dead. Then, go ahead and tell people what happened up here." Jesus flat out said, "This is how it is all going to happen." And what happened a few months later on the night before Jesus died? Peter got all flustered and cut a guy's ear off. Somehow, he thought, "I know what Jesus needs right now with Judas and all these ne'er-do-wells coming in here to arrest him! A bodyguard!" Until, he also got scared senseless and ran away. Then, when he got the courage to go back to the courtyard and see what was happening, it was quite short-lived, because he ended up denying even knowing Jesus at all, three times within a couple of minutes.

It is certainly good for us to be standing here, to witness Jesus in all his divine glory. But Matthew 17:9 says, "**As they were coming down the mountain...**" Why can't we stay up there, Jesus? Why can't we have the glory and the power all the time?

Well, that wasn't what Moses and the Israelites, Elijah and the Israelites, and even Peter needed. The glory and the power are certainly good for us to see to know just how strong Jesus is as God here on earth. But Jesus did not come so that we could put up shelters and stay in the moments when we feel most glorious and powerful on earth. Jesus did not come to this earth to fill our selfish desires to be better and mightier than those around us. He did not come to give us a swagger that others are jealous of. He came to address our problem with sin. He came to get us out from that deadly pit. He came to remove all of our guilt and shame. He came to take the pain and punishment we deserve so that we could have peace with God and the joy of heaven.

This eternally and supremely powerful God, who was veiled in flesh for us, had to humble himself to death on the cross. He was not helpless. He was not incapable. He was willing to do what we needed. He allowed it all to happen to him, so that it wouldn't have to happen to us. That's the kind of Savior we need. The one who can take our sins on himself and make the full payment that we could never make.

It's good for us to be standing here to see him in full splendor. It's good for us to be standing here to listen as the Father's voice once again reassures us that Jesus is the right choice. It's good for us to be standing here next to Jesus, the fulfillment of everything God had promised. But it's good to come down from this mountaintop. We don't need all that glory and power now. We need the Savior from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil.

And the thing is, because Jesus came down from this mountaintop, we still have the glory and the power of God. It's just not in the places we always look. Did you hear what Peter wrote? The same guy, who said, "Jesus, it's great up here. Let's stay." Well, he came down, and after he denied Jesus, and after the risen and victorious Jesus assured Peter that he was forgiven and restored, Peter wrote, "We didn't

make this stuff up. We saw it. But there's more. God gave us his Word. It's true and reliable because it all comes from the almighty, all-powerful God of heaven and earth." That's basically what Peter says in that second reading that we heard.

Because Jesus came down from the mountaintop, we don't just have some story. God in flesh came and accomplished everything that was necessary for our salvation. Jesus fulfilled every promise God had made. And his disciples were not just eyewitnesses of all this, but he gave them every word to speak and to write, which means we have the power and glory of God's faithful and reliable Word. We have the light that chases the darkness of doubt and unbelief away.

Unlike the fading glory that Moses saw. Unlike the fading glory that Elijah saw. Unlike the glory that encircled the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration – because Jesus came down from that mountain and finished his saving work – we have the undying glory of God's Word. And that stands forever.

My brothers and sisters, this is precisely why it is good for a pastor from Wisconsin to be standing here on a beautiful Sunday in Arizona. You might think it was so I could get out of the winter weather for a while? No way, I love cold and winter. I served at congregations in Wisconsin and North Dakota for almost 14 years. I'm here, not as an eyewitness like Peter, but with the same prophetic message of God that is completely reliable. I here with the same words that the Holy Spirit inspired those men to speak and to write. I here because the light of the gospel still overcomes the darkness.

Through the Word and Sacrament, God is pleased to reveal his saving power. And that's probably not where we would expect it to be. We would think God should use something bigger, better, more powerful. But God puts his saving power in places we would not always look. A manger. A cross. Pages of a book. Water. Bread and wine. That's what God chooses to do. And somehow, he can use people like me to do it. He uses Pastor Sellnow and Pastor Jacobson to do it. He uses teachers to do it. The power is the inspired and reliable Word of God. And God uses people to get that message out to the world.

And we need more of those people who proclaim the gospel. And so, it is good to be standing here. Because Luther Prep is a high school that wants to help kids think about being those proclaimers of the gospel, those pastors and teachers who use the powerful Word. Luther Prep is a high school that wants kids to shine with that light that dispels the darkness. Luther Prep is a high school that wants to put kids on a path to service in ministry.

And this isn't just some high school in Wisconsin. Luther Prep is your high school, because together in our Wisconsin Synod church body we all own and operate Luther Prep to carry out that mission of helping kids consider ways of serving the Lord, ways of telling people exactly what Jesus said as he was coming down that mountain. He died. He rose. He conquered sin, death, and hell. And the world needs to hear it. God uses people, well-trained and called pastors and teachers, to do that.

And that is why I pray that more of you will be up in the Midwest in Watertown, WI at Luther Prep's campus, in New Ulm, MN at Martin Luther College's campus, in Mequon, WI at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's campus. I pray that more of you, children, parents, and grandparents, will be there saying what Peter said, "Lord it is good to be here." I pray more of you, young men, will say one day just like I am here today, "It is good for me to be standing in this pulpit to proclaim the eternal and powerful gospel of Jesus."

Let others go after the glory and prestige of this world. That fades into nothing. But this reliable and powerful Word of God, this good news of a Savior, who came down from the physical glory to win the eternal victory for us, who washed us clean, who makes us children of God – this word is the power makes us say, "It is good for us to be here." God grant us many more who will stand up speak those words. Amen.