

The Festival of the Transfiguration of Our Lord
21 January, Anno Domini 2018
2 Peter 1:16-21
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It has come into vogue among the enemies of God's Word to mock the Holy Scriptures as the outdated, unreliable ramblings of ignorant and bigoted men, filled with errors and fables and clearly little more than nonsense in light of our modern, scientific, enlightened brilliance. It's not new. We aren't the first generation of God's people to face such criticism. Listen to St. Peter - "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Our faith is not rooted in legends and fairytales. Our salvation is not found in a series of Aesop's fables. It is true that the whole of our faith is built upon the writings of the apostles and the prophets, texts which are millennia old. They were written in cultures that were very different from our in some ways, but much the same in many others. But age and culture have nothing to do with the question at hand - are they true?

That's what is at issue. Can we believe what is in them? According to St. Peter, absolutely. Peter commends to us an important reality to remember - he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of what they heard and saw. Admittedly, witnesses can perjure themselves. They can lie. But did these? Did Peter and James and John really see what they say they saw? Obviously you and I weren't there, so do we really have grounds to comment? Do we have any reason to believe that they made it all up other than not having seen it ourselves? Just because we don't like the facts or the consequences of those facts doesn't mean that we get to reject them. Just because we can't understand or make sense of the truth, doesn't mean that it's any less true. If the witnesses are reliable then their testimony is to be believed along with its consequences.

I'm not going to get into all the apologetic argument for the reliability of the Scriptures - but they are most certainly there and there are lots of them. By every measure of historical reliability and textual accuracy, both the Old and New Testament Scriptures are to be believed as much if not more than most other known works. It goes without saying that many of the events recorded in the Scriptures are mind-boggling and don't necessarily fit into

our models of logic and reason. But, that means nothing. Just because I can't explain or measure a thing doesn't mean it didn't happen.

To be sure, the question of the truth of the Scriptures is paramount. If, as many argue, the Scriptures are filled with errors and lies, then everything in the Scriptures is suspect and we have no reason for the hope that we have in Jesus, no reason to believe anything about the Christian faith. But this is another way in which God has shown His great mercy - He has revealed Himself and His will and provided a written testimony to the accomplishment of our salvation. It isn't wrapped in myth or legend because we are living in reality. We are not myth. Our sin and our death are not make-believe stories.

Neither is God's saving work in Jesus Christ. He appeared to people. Our Savior walked on the earth for thirty-some years. He was seen. He was heard. The miracles were seen by thousands. Even Jesus' enemies admitted their truth - that's why they wanted Him dead. It's why they wanted Lazarus dead - again. Lazarus was living proof of Christ's divine power and thus the truthfulness of His identity and preaching. They saw Lazarus dead and knew that he had been dead for four days. There was no doubt about his death. And then, he was alive because Jesus of Nazareth showed His power over death - "Lazarus, come out!"

Thousands heard Jesus preaching, saw demons driven out, saw paralytics walking and the blind seeing. Jesus' own death was as public as it gets and when He rose again He appeared to more than 500 of His disciples and even to St. Paul on the road to Damascus. And let's not forget that even St. Peter himself was a skeptic, refusing to believe the report of the women and the empty tomb. But then, Peter saw with his own eyes the very same Jesus that had been transfigured on the holy mountain! He could no longer deny it - Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, foretold by the prophets, the Son of the Living God who had made full payment for the sins of the whole world.

Peter and the other apostles and martyrs were all willing to shed their blood in witness to the truth that they had heard with their own ears and seen with their own eyes. God desires that you know and believe that He has saved you in Christ Jesus. He doesn't want you to have doubts about your forgiveness. He knows that our guilt before Him is absolutely real and that the eternal judgment we deserve because of it is equally as real. He knows

the terror of those who hear honestly the guilty verdict of the Ten Commandments ringing in their ears. He knows that your suffering, your fear, your doubt, and your pain are not fairytales. He knows just how real they are. And so just as equally real is His love for you in Jesus. He has attached His own witness to Jesus, declaring Him not once but twice to be His beloved Son with whom the Father is well-pleased.

Consider the great love of God that He has placed before us His inerrant and infallible Word and preserved that Word over the millennia in a very humble and plain way - the written testimony of His prophets and apostles. You don't need to make up the true Christian faith. What comfort would there be in that? And who would ever just spin out of their imagination that God would die for sinners? Look around and see that no other religion in the world has ever invented such a way for man to obtain eternal life. Every other religion is simply some version of man earning his own way into God's favor. Every other religion demands that you are the solution to your problem. But the wages of sin is death! That means I would have to raise myself from death to life. How could I possibly do that? I can't. God can and has and does. He has given His Son, Jesus, the fullness of all God's glory, as the sacrificial Lamb, to stand in our place under God's righteous judgment and to die our death. Peter and the other apostles saw it happen with their own eyes. They saw Jesus alive again, victor over the grave, and they received this simple command from Him - "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation. Tell every man, woman, and child that death is a vanquished foe. Bear witness to the ends of the earth to what you have seen and heard so that they may know for certain that their sins have been blotted out once and for all. Nothing remains to be earned. Only believe what has already been accomplished."

And here, beloved, we can hold in our own hands that sure prophetic word and apostolic witness. The Holy Scriptures that remove all reason for fear and doubt. None of this is the invention of men. None of this is just some fantastic tale told to sell books. The witnesses of these 66 books did not come about by the will of man but by the will of God Himself. And to ensure that they included all that was necessary the Holy Spirit Himself guided and carried them along for the simple reason that God wants you to be 100% certain of who He is, who you are, and what He has done for you. These things are not the product of someone's interpretation. The Scriptures don't need our fallible interpretation, clouded by our pride and sinfulness. When God speaks, we only need to listen and believe. God

has said exactly what He means, nothing more, nothing less. The witness is clear - we are wretched sinners who can claim no amount of goodness before God and deserve nothing from Him but His wrath and eternal death. Yet, and let this ring in your ears and comfort your heart, God is merciful and compassionate and does not desire your death. He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, to take the great burden of your sin as His own and suffer and die for it - all of it. And He lives. The ransom has been paid and you have been set free. And even more, God has graciously given you the Sacraments that bear His own testimony. Your Baptism is God's declaration that you are Christ's own child. The bread and the wine bear with them by God's promise the very instruments of your salvation - Christ's true Body and Blood - that you may be a participant a partaker of the sacrifice so that with all boldness and confidence you may say, on the basis of the Word of Christ Himself, this was given and shed for me for the forgiveness of all my sins.

Let the world cackle and rage and fall all over itself trying to disprove the Word of the living and true God. They never will for the simple reason that it is the inerrant, infallible, unchangeable truth. They, like their father the devil, can't stand the truth and so they try everything imaginable to twist and pervert God's Word to say something else. They despise the Word because it does not glorify them. It glorifies instead the one true God and His Son who saved us. Praise and thanks be to God for this sure Word of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Your salvation, the Word of Holy Absolution, is built on the witness of the prophets, the apostles, and the Blood of God's only Son. Listen to this witness and rejoice in the good and certain news of God's love and mercy for you!

In the Name of +Jesus.