

"Through or Around?"

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Representatives of the Lord Jesus: When you pray, for what do you pray – for strength or for escape? Do you pray to pass through trials or to be able to go around them? We already know the answer. The point of the exercise is to make sure that *each of us* come to recognize the answer for ourselves. Human beings nearly always pray for escape rather than strength; avoidance of hardship and pain rather than the courage and perseverance to bear up under such things. Nothing necessarily wrong or sinful with that, but danger crouches in the shadows of such prayers.

Life is far too evil, far too sinful, far too complex to imagine that avoidance of all hardship and pain is possible, even for Christians. With sin came sickness and disease, and many of those diseases will afflict Christians (including you and me). Sin results in accidents, pain, and suffering – which will also very likely affect both us and those we love. Sin brought death, and the clock is therefore ticking for every single human being from the very moment they are conceived.

The point here is not to turn Christians into morbid pessimists, fearful of our own shadows, but to remind each other that forewarned is forearmed. We live in a society that increasingly deludes itself that science, medicine, insurance – even prayer – can provide some sort of insulation against all that is difficult or painful. The reality is that many things in life are unavoidably difficult – always have been and always will be.

We will seek to address this general topic this morning on the basis of our text, found in the Ninth Chapter of Luke's Gospel – the account of our Lord's Transfiguration:

^{ESV} **Luke 9:28-36** *Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let*

us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

These are the words of our God – clearly they represent the greatest treasure that we have to share with the world. Though we may lack some or most of the material wealth of this world, we need lack none of the spiritual riches, for they are here for the asking. That our God would richly supply us this morning through the study of these words, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Has anyone here ever met even one Christian who, with the passing of time, would deny the value of the hard times they suffered? In fact the vast majority of seasoned Christians would unreservedly testify to the great benefits they have harvested from the most difficult of circumstances. Most have learned that hard times are not only good but *necessary*. Our text for this morning – the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord – is the ultimate case in point. The Transfiguration marks the beginning of the Lenten season. We rightly recognize it as a special strengthening of our Lord just before the terrible days of Holy Week. There are clearly many lessons for us to learn here from this event, but this morning we focus on just one in particular: the wisdom in seeking strength from our God, rather than just avoidance or escape from that which is difficult. We want to learn to accept "through" from the hand of our loving God, not just "around."

Why is this particular philosophy or mindset important? Again, we study our text for answers and trust that our God will richly supply our need.

When Jesus, as true man, considered what lay before him, what was his initial reaction or desire? We hear it in his impassioned prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."** He prayed, in other words, that he might be permitted to avoid the unimaginable misery that awaited him as he carried the weight of the world's sins to the cross. Yet what did he add to his prayer: **"Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done."**

The bitter reality was that there was no other way to accomplish the rescue of sinful mankind. Had there been any other way, Jesus' loving Father would certainly have granted his prayer. In fact had there been any other way, Jesus would never have left heaven in the first place. From this we learn just how desperate our condition was (and is) apart from Jesus Christ. Man could not save himself, nor could any other human being offer a payment for the sins of another. Psalm 49 tells us: **"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him - for the redemption of their souls is costly."** Our one and only chance for forgiveness and eternal life was through the rescue earned by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus.

Here then the basic premise or truth is laid: *Certain good things in life can only come at a cost, and that cost is absolutely and unequivocally unavoidable.* In the case of our salvation, the entire cost was borne by our Lord. The Transfiguration represented a special strengthening for Jesus as he prepared to complete his great and necessary work.

How then does mankind fit into this truth? How do we benefit from the understanding that we need to learn to pray for strength to go through, rather than just grace to go around?

Note well the rather senseless response of Peter when he saw the spectacular sights described in our text: **"Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents-- one for you, and one for Moses and one for Elijah."** We refer to his words as "senseless" not because his words or desires were necessarily sinful, but because our text tells us **"he did not know what he was saying."** We read Peter's words as an emotional response to the utter joy that was his at that particular moment.

Maybe you've experienced one of those *"I wish we could just stay like this forever"* moments. Peter had apparently found such joy and contentment in the presence of his glorified Lord that he wanted to stay right there, indefinitely. And why not? He was with his friends; he was with his Lord; and in the light of that glorious sight, all was right with the world. Can you really blame him for wanting to stay?

Only he couldn't stay, could he? Why not? First and foremost because Jesus couldn't stay. He had to be about his Father's business – our salvation. But there was more to it than just that. Every single Christian needs to learn that life on earth is not all about me. It is all about the will of my God and the good of my neighbor. To stay in that place at that time held great appeal for Peter, James, and John – and even, to a certain extent, for Jesus himself – but not for the rest of mankind, including you

and me. Jesus had to leave that place and walk the brutal path to the cross. Peter, James, and John had a Church to build – and much to suffer.

What awaited these men after they left that place? Jesus, of course, went to be abused, forsaken and crucified. Peter went on to be whipped, beaten, and harassed, to suffer hunger and hardship of every sort, and eventually to be crucified like his Lord. James was hacked to death with a sword at the command of King Herod. John spent many miserable years in exile on the Island of Patmos, was released, and died an old man after decades of contending for the Christian faith against great opposition.

Would it have been better for these men to have remained on the Mount of Transfiguration indefinitely, or even to have died there? From a physical standpoint, certainly. Would that have been best for you and me and the rest of the Christian Church? Clearly not. How much poorer we would all be without the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Peter, and the Revelation. How much poorer the Church without the foundation these men helped to lay and the example, instruction and witness they provided for countless souls during their time of grace on earth. Did such things come easily or without personal cost and sacrifice? Obviously not. Would Peter, James, and John have opted for the easier road had they been given the option? Of course, but the point here is that such things are not always possible. So also Paul and Barnabas warned the Christians in Asia Minor: **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."** (Acts 14:22)

Now carry these things forward into your own life and let them instruct and strengthen you. Rare to non-existent is the Christian who prays for hard times to come into his life and into the lives of his loved ones. We pray that they might go around us, or we around them. We pray for a hedge or wall of protection erected by our God. Nothing wrong with that, in and of itself. We noted earlier that Jesus did the same. Yet what we also want to note this morning is that the answer to Jesus' prayer was "No." There was simply no avoiding the hard things that faced Jesus. There may well be no avoiding the hard things that lie ahead for us – not if we are to survive this sick, perverse world and join our Lord and all the saints in paradise. Not if we are to carry out our Lord's Great Commission to **"make disciples of all nations."**

Forewarned is not only forearmed here, knowing these facts in advance is intended by our God to steel our resolve for the work that lies ahead and the good things that will result for all of God's children.

No one hearing or reading these words relishes the thought of suffering, yet we have here been given not only a view of those who have gone before, but a vision of the certain end of all those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

As Peter, James, and John dutifully followed their Lord down off of that glorious mountain, so we too have been commissioned to brave the worst that a sinful world has to offer in our struggle to share the Word of Life. Exactly what form that hardship will take in your individual existence no one can predict. Standing for the truth may alienate you from the members of your own family. It may cause your exclusion from the circle of those who you thought were your friends. Standing for the truth of God's Word may one day place you at odds with your government. Or your trials may take a different path. Perhaps God will allow physical, mental, or emotional suffering in your life so that you might reach out and help others, bringing them the message of the gospel. God may find the need to remove your wealth so that you learn not to set your heart on that which will not survive the fires of Judgment Day. God alone knows what the future holds for any of us.

Sin ruined all. The entrance of sin into God's perfect creation necessitated many painful lessons. Know through them all that the love of our God does not fail – no more than it failed when he allowed his own dear Son to suffer for that which he did not cause. Know also that ***"God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you can bear."*** (1 Corinthians 10:13) This is our hope; this is our confidence. In recognizing such truths we prepare not only to enter the season of Lent, but for the rest of our lives in humble service to the Living God. Thy will, O God, be done – also in us. If hard times are necessary, we ask only the strength to bear up under whatever you in your wisdom allow. All because we know one thing more. For all who die in the Christian faith, eternal life with our Lord is also absolutely unavoidable. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 34:1-12** Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ And the LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." ⁵ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, ⁶ and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. ⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. ⁸ And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. ⁹ ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:1-6** Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses--as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

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Transfiguration Sunday – March 3, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 135 (Red Hymnal)

"'Tis Good Lord to Be Here"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Deuteronomy 34:1-12) Our first reading is the account of the death of Moses. Moses died on Mount Nebo, in sight of the Promised Land, and was buried by God himself. This has application to our sermon this morning in that Moses was one of the two – along with the Prophet Elijah – that spoke to Jesus at his Transfiguration. We are told they spoke to Jesus about his impending death. Someday it will be most interesting to be able to hear what they said to him. May God so comfort each of us.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30)

The Second Lesson: (Hebrews 3:1-6) Our New Testament lesson "puts Moses in his place." Not that Moses needed to be reprimanded, but his work and calling needed to be clarified, especially as it relates to Jesus and his work and calling. Through Moses came the Law. Man could not, would not, keep that law. We therefore needed someone to keep the law in our place. That is what Jesus came to do. That is what Jesus *has now done for us*.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 719 (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus on the Mountain Peak"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 9:28-36 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Through or Around?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn -341 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -341 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (25) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
	-11:20 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Ash Wednesday Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service w/ Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Missionary Peter Evensen has returned the call to Resurrection of Corpus Christi, TX. Pastor Joe Naumann is considering the call to Bethel of Morris, MN. Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to St. John's of Clarkston, WA.

Easter Flowers – There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for all who would like to order Easter flowers again this year. The flowers will be used to decorate the church on Easter Sunday, and can then be taken home or passed along to someone who might enjoy them.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning.

Lent – The Season of Lent begins this week with our mid-week Ash Wednesday service on Wednesday at 7pm. Our services this year will be similar to our Advent services, with a Bible Study taking the place of a sermon during the service.

Confirmation Class – Parents and Confirmation students please note the earlier start time for classes. Beginning this week and continuing through Easter, classes will begin at 5:45pm.

Time Out in March – Our second Time Out meeting was this past Friday. A thank you to our hosts this month, Mick and Kristi Johnson, as well as Angela and Gary for their work with the little ones. Next meeting is April 5.