

## **Mark 9:2-9**

Transfiguration B + February 14, 2021  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
Son of God, Son of Man

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Just in case you were wondering, Jesus is the Son of God. He can't make it much more obvious than today's gospel reading, where He takes Peter, James and John up on a high mountain. He's transfigured before them: He's still got His human form, a body that does everything that human bodies do, but His is shining. He's radiating light from the inside out. You can't do that, but He can: at all times, the glory of God is inside Jesus because Jesus is God in the flesh; and for just a little while on this mountain, Jesus lets a little bit of His divinity shine through His humanity. That's exhibit A.

Exhibit B is the presence of Moses and Elijah with Him. They're two of the greatest men of the Old Testament, long since passed on from this world. They're representative of the Law and Prophets, and "the Law and the Prophets" just happens to be a nickname for the Old Testament. There they are, talking with Jesus; and we know from Luke that they're talking to Jesus about Him and His upcoming departure by way of the cross. The entire Old Testament is given to point to the Christ, and now Moses and Elijah have returned to do the same. This Jesus is the One, God's beloved Son.

Exhibit C is the plainest of the bunch for terrified disciples, though it's also the part that terrifies them. A cloud overshadows them, but not just any sort of cloud: this is a distinctly Old Testament cloud. It's the sort that led the people of Israel out of Egypt by day, glowing with fire when the sun went down. It's the sort of cloud that would enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle when they set up camp in the wilderness, and later on the temple in Jerusalem. This is God the Father, concealing His glory in a cloud as He speaks of the One who conceals His glory in human flesh. He overshadows terrified disciples and says, "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him."

It's pretty convincing, if you ask me. Jesus is the Son of God.

In the gospel of Mark, though, He isn't called the Son of God very often. Well, Mark makes it clear in chapter 1, verse 1, when he begins with the spoiler by saying, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Just eleven verses later, when Jesus is baptized, God the Father declares from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased." After that, there's a lull: occasionally, it's the demons who identify Him as the Son of God, but He shuts them up right away. Then you get the Transfiguration here, where the Father pretty much repeats Himself from Jesus' baptism. After this, though, there's a big, long drought. Looking for Jesus to be called the Son of God in the second half of Mark is almost like looking for alleluias in Lent. (Enjoy them, today, while you can!)

Most of the time, Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man. There's actually a lot of debate about that term. People mostly figure that Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man because it's a term for the Messiah, and that's true; but it's only a term for the Messiah because Jesus keeps calling Himself the Son of Man. It doesn't have a lot of prior meaning to it. The Lord repeatedly calls the prophet Ezekiel, "son of man," but there's no great connection to Jesus' use of the term. Bible commentaries tend to say something like, "Jesus uses the term 'Son of Man' and fills it with meaning Himself," which is kind of what I said already; but what is the meaning He gives?

I'll throw my hat in the ring with this humble suggestion: even though we have the New Testament in Greek, we can assume that the Jewish Jesus is speaking Hebrew or Aramaic most of the time. If you put "son of man" into Hebrew, you get "son of Adam," because the name "Adam" is the Hebrew word for "man." Most of the time, when the Son of God refers to Himself in the gospel of Mark,

He calls Himself the son of Adam. In part, this is about His person: it's a wonderful affirmation of His humanity, that the eternal Son of God is born of Mary, and He can trace His ancestry back to David, to Abraham and even to the first Adam. In part, it also reveals His work: sons serve their elders, and this son of Adam has come to serve the first Adam and all of his descendants by dying to redeem them from their sin, to save them from eternal death. Jesus has become a son of Adam to save all the sons of Adam, not to mention the daughters too.

On the one hand, it sounds outlandish to His hearers when Jesus says that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10) or that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), because what sort of descendant of Adam has authority like that? On the other hand, you also hear Him tell His disciples that the Son of Man will be betrayed and put to death (9:31; 10:33), because "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Here, though, at the Transfiguration, you literally get this one shining moment to remind you that this Jesus, born of Mary, is also the eternal Son of God – God in full. When Peter proposes making tents on the mountain, his suggestion goes nowhere: Jesus already has a tent – His human body, for the Word has become flesh to "tent" among His people (John 1:14). Rather than camp out on a remote mountain, He's going to make His journey to the cross, the grave, hell and eventually His throne in heaven.

For this shining moment, though, you get the Son of God shining in His glory; and you get the Father of God saying, "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him." Before you journey to the cross in Lent, you get the Transfiguration to remind you that the Son of Adam is the Son of God.

That doesn't mean as much to you as it should. Spend a little time examining yourself for your sins, the big ones, the little ones, the stupid ones and the ones you carefully calculated and should own for the rest of eternity. Consider yourself for your sinfulness that leads to these transgressions – consider who you are, especially the parts you don't want anybody else to know. Add it up and utter those searing words, "It's my fault." Then look at the Transfiguration, and see that no less than holy God Himself, who could content Himself with shining in glory, walks off the mountain, goes to Jerusalem and hauls a cross up another hill to die in your place for your sin. Shudder at your fault, wonder at His love, and cling to the One who has died and is risen for you.

If you are to cling to Christ, heed the Word of God the Father, spoken from the cloud to the disciples. Not just, "This is My beloved Son," but, "listen to Him."

Listen to Him, says the Father, because Jesus works and saves by His Word. He heals the sick and casts out demons by speaking, and He forgives sins and grants eternal life by speaking as well. He doesn't save by shows of glory. A couple of weeks ago in our Old Testament lesson, you heard Moses retell the story of the first time God appeared in glory on a mountaintop: it was at Mt. Sinai, just after the Exodus, and He spoke directly to all of His people out of that glorious cloud. What was their response? They begged that God would no longer speak to them directly, but that He would speak to them through a man. So the Lord gave His Word to them to Moses. Now, He has become flesh to speak to us through another man, Himself. "In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets, and now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son." (Hebrews 1:1) Listen to Him; because when Jesus speaks, He is speaking to save you.

Listen to Him, because His saving Word will set you straight when you are prone to wander. By nature, you like glory: you're attracted to easy success as much as you are repelled by suffering. When Jesus starts the journey down the mountain, He warns His disciples not to talk about the Transfiguration until after He's risen from the dead, and then He tells them He's going to be crucified. They listen, but they do not understand: they would rather that following Jesus always means glorious mountaintop experiences, not His death for the sins of the world. Likewise, you want to believe that in this world, following Jesus means an easy, carefree life; and if your life is not easy or carefree, then you're prone to

believe that Jesus is a disappointment. But Jesus speaks the truth, even when your sinful hearts are whispering lies. There will be trouble here because you're a sinner in a sinful world; and there will be trouble here because you're a follower of Jesus in a world that wants Jesus gone. What you see around you will often persuade you with lies that Jesus is worthless. That's why you listen to Him, because that is where you hear the truth; and because you hear His truth, you believe even though you do not yet see.

Listen to Him, because Jesus won't always look glorious. All too soon, He'll look like a beaten, scourged and bloodied man hanging dead on a cross; and He will look like that because He submits to being the dead man on the cross for your sins. It looks like failure – it looks like devil, world and sinful flesh all triumph that day, but you know that His death is the sacrifice that defeats His enemies and gives you life.

In fact, and mark this well, after the Transfiguration there is only one more time in Mark that Jesus is called the Son of God; and it's in a most unlikely place by a most unlikely man. It's the centurion who has overseen His crucifixion, who has listened to the dying Christ, and who says, "Truly this man was the Son of God." With those few words, this Gentile executioner confesses the Incarnation and the Sacrifice for your redemption.

We'll quibble with the centurion on one point: it is not "was," but "is." Jesus is the Son of God, for He is risen from the dead. Risen from the dead, He still visits you in His Word and sacraments. As He does so, He still conceals His glory: the bread and wine don't glow with light, nor does the pastor preaching the sermon. But church isn't about a light show: it's about hearing the Word of God: the Word of the One who became flesh, died and rose again to redeem you – redeem you so that you might be raised to eternal life, where you will see Him in glory forevermore.

Until then, the Christ is still here. The Son of God is not so great and mighty that He cannot sympathize with your weakness, because He has become man. The Son of Man is not so small that He cannot rescue from sin and death, for He remains God always, now and forevermore. Listen to Him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen