

*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...
(Matthew 16:24)*

In our culture, we do our darndest to hold onto important moments. At events – from sports, to concerts, to birthday parties – smartphones are ubiquitous. Almost everyone in attendance has one in his or her hand, ‘snapping’ hundreds of pictures of whatever is happening. We may all be universally annoyed by this, yet almost all of us end up doing it at one point or another. In sight of gorgeous scenery, we do the same. Most people standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon are taking pictures. Sure, it’s good to have pictures of what we want to record and remember. But, if that’s our main focus, what are we missing out on? Obviously, a picture can never do justice to something like the Grand Canyon. But, even more, we all too often miss out on the fullness of an experience which is going on right in front of us.

In February, our liturgical season moves from Epiphany into Lent. The climax of Epiphany in our lectionary series is the Transfiguration of Jesus. You probably remember the story – our Lord Jesus brings Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain apart from the rest of the disciples. As quickly as they had arrived, everything changed. Jesus was completely transformed. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as snow. Peter, James, and John also saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus! Could this moment be any more majestic? So, what did Peter want to do? Naturally, he wanted to keep the moment going for as long as he could. *It is good that we are here, Lord. If you wish I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah* (Matthew 17:4). Peter doesn’t want the moment to end. Who would?

Sometimes we’re tempted to act like Peter. We might look at old pictures and end up longing for the ‘good old days’. People dressed a certain way for church. We sang particular hymns and songs. The pastor preached this way or that way. And the pews were full. Now – well, now we look around and things are different. It doesn’t look the same, and it doesn’t feel the same. So what do we do? We try to recapture that feeling, that experience, that reality any way we can. If only we could get back to that. So we change this. We alter that. We come up with some new program or activity to ‘attract’ people. We avoid saying anything controversial. If only we could get back to that moment...

Peter missed the point – and sometimes, so do we. Following Jesus isn’t about capturing what we *think* is glorious. It’s not even about what is *actually* glorious right now. The truth is, Jesus has invited us to follow him down a long road. As we travel that road, there are majestic moments where we feel blessed simply to be a part of them. There are great successes and good times. But the Father makes it clear to us, just as he did to the disciples. We would be foolish to try to capture that glory and keep it. Why? Because doing so interrupts our own road to the cross. For Jesus, nothing was going to interrupt his road. Not Peter, not James, not John, not Pilate, not the Pharisees, not anyone or anything. Jesus would reveal his glory by suffering and dying. And he did – all to forgive your sins. It was only then, after his death, that he could rise in eternal glory, because his work of defeating sin and death had been completed.

Jesus doesn’t call us to find glory, let alone try to capture it. He calls us to die with him. Only then, on the way to the cross, will we find what is truly exciting, truly glorious, truly joyful, and eternally significant. Only there will we find Jesus.

-Pastor Squire

“Tis good, Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain; but since Thou bidst us leave the mount, come with us to the plain.”
(“Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here,” *LSB 414*, v. 5)