



DP Vantage Point

For Christ and for His world SWD magnifies partnerships, multiplies ministries, and maximizes resources.

January 20, 2016

Thoughts on Transfiguration Gospel
Mark 9:2-9

Dear Brothers in Christ:

Sinful human beings that we are we don't have the slightest idea of what God does for us. The Prophet Isaiah: "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him." We cannot assault the pearly gates of heaven with our good works. Our good intentions are not good enough to open our Lord's heart. The Prophet Isaiah says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." King David in Psalm 5: "The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you *hate* all evildoers." Like Eve before us we sinful human beings may want to be like God; but we cannot because we are sinners. We cannot access God in some mystical experience or through our own ingenuity.

God is not found the dark of the night in some out of body experience. We cannot come to God unless he comes to us first. That simple truth is summarized by God himself when he tells his Old Testament people, "In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you." In Old Testament times that was in the tabernacle; in New Testament times that our God comes to us in the person of His Son. After Jesus' birth we now longer hear the phrase, "the glory of the Lord" because Jesus Himself is the glory of the Lord. It's what St. Paul has in mind when he writes to the Corinthians that our God "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Our Lord Jesus brings glory to His Father. That truth is demonstrated as Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him to the top of a small mountain. They have come here to pray. What happens as they are praying is not the idea of Peter, James, or John. What happens here on this mountain is Jesus showing them the glory that rightfully belongs to him as the Son of God. St. Luke tells that "As [*Jesus*] was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." St. Matthew tells us that "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." This Jesus whom they had been following for nearly three years is more than a miracle worker. He is more that merely a rabbi, or a spiritual leader. This is the very Son of the Almighty God. The likes of Moses and Elijah consult him. Though those two have left this earth, they are alive; standing with our Lord Jesus in glory. From the glory God the Father speaks from heaven's throne, "This is my Son," he says, "whom I have chosen. Listen to him." This Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, is the Son of God, the Messiah, our Savior.

Oh, to have been there! Oh to have actually experienced this magnificent event! Too bad someone didn't have an iPhone to capture it for all mankind to see, to put it on YouTube. The glory of the Lord is here on this mountain. The whole world should see it. Peter, James, and John are here with Moses and Elijah, and the Son of God. At times we Christians yearn for something like this. At times sinners cry out for some supernatural event, some mystical vision; something, anything that would confirm our faith; something, anything that would convince and convict the skeptic that what we believe is not myth but reality. And we have it in the person of our Lord Jesus. We hear it when we read Holy Scripture. We experience it in the body and blood that he gives us in Holy Communion. It lies in the joy that fills our heart when we celebrate Christmas and Easter. Those are not just holidays. Those are days on which the glory of the Lord and what He does for us sinners shines forth as brilliantly as Jesus' face on this mountain. God's glory is seen in the Virgin Birth. The glory of the Lord is obvious in the crucifixion and in the resurrection.

What happens on this mountain is a precious blessing that is ours by faith. St. Paul tells the Thessalonian believers, "He [God] called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." We experience that glory whenever our spirit rejoices in the forgiveness that Jesus earned for us. We experience it whenever we make that sad journey to the cemetery with the remains of a loved one. That is a sad journey, but because of the transfiguration, we know that is not the last journey. Martin Luther makes the comment, "Even though I am now destined for death... I shall arise from the grave with glory and with a transfigured body."

May our gracious Lord have mercy!
Rev. Dr. John C. Wille
President LCMS-SWD

A Word from Luther:

One must do the same thing in one's calling and eventually even in death. When GOD appoints me leader against the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18), against the raging of the whole world, and against the weakness of my flesh, in what frame of mind must we be in these circumstances? For who am I to fight first against so many hosts of all demons and men, and then against the weakness of my flesh? I answer: "One must be mindful of God's command." The Lord says: "Go, and you will prevail; I will be with you." Thus He tells Moses to go to the Egyptian king and to lead the people out of tyranny and the iron furnace. Does that not seem foolish and impossible, to lead out such a great people, and to lead them out in such a manner that they do not leave a hoof behind, as Moses says to Pharaoh (Ex. 10:26)? But according to my reason I would have said: "You will not lead out even a hoof, much less such a great people; for the king is powerful and a cruel tyrant." But Moses speaks in no other way with Pharaoh than as if he had already led that huge multitude out, even though it seems to be a fictitious story, a foolish and completely impossible thought if you take reason into account. For whatever faith dictates and the Word promises must be done, because God is the Word and the Word is God (of. John 1:1). He who has the Word has the power of God, as Rom. 1:16 says.

Outwardly, to be sure, it appears to be no different from a human voice and foolishness on the part of the man who is speaking, just as Peter says to Cornelius in Acts 10:26: "I, too, am a man." Peter has

the Word, and in Cornelius' ears it has the sound of a human voice. Nevertheless, it does wonders of all kinds. Thus we should be encouraged against all dangers which threaten from the Turks and other enemies. Indeed, we should be encouraged against death itself. For, if we have been absolved through the mouth of a brother or a minister; we must not look at the human being who is speaking. Nor should our eyes be directed toward danger or death. And one should not consider the grave, the corruption, the worms, and the decay to which I am exposed. For reason without faith thinks: "It is not possible for a dead body, which is buried, consumed by worms, or burned and reduced to ashes to live, is it?" Indeed, reason flatly denies this and says: "It is not true." The spirit, on the other hand, contradicts and says: "It is true. Even though I am now destined for death, I seem to myself to be living; and I shall arise from the grave with glory and with a transfigured body."

Therefore faith is an all-powerful battle which, in opposition to the battle of the flesh, clings to the Word and the promise with one and the same prospect. [*Luther's works, vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30.* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 130–131) cph]

SWD News and Tidbits:

- 1) Installation of Vicar David Blas as Vicar/Missionary to the Hispanic population of Sheboygan County:**



It is a wonderful story about outreach and our congregations banding together to reach out into their community. David Blas who is involved in the Hispanic Institute of Theology, was called by the congregations of Sheboygan to reach out to the Hispanic population in their midst. This is an wonderful partnership between the various Sheboygan congregation, our South Wisconsin District,

and The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod; each providing financial and logistical support for this new work. Personally, I thank each of the men in the picture for their passion, for their desire and willingness to step up to be part of this new mission effort. Carlos Hernandez preached, one of his points, "If we can start a Hispanic mission in Sheboygan, we can start one anywhere." It is a compliment to the pastors and congregations who noticed the emerging Hispanic culture in their midst.

The pastors in the picture from left to right are: Peter Kelm, Carlos Hernandez who heads the Hispanic mission outreach for the LCMS, Nathan Meador, Adam Scheblein, Allen Kretschmar, and Tom Gudmundson.

Added to the excitement of what is happening in Sheboygan, a new Hmong mission effort has begun at Good Shepherd with Pastors Chris Gugel and Joshua Lee leading the way. In the short time this effort has been reaching out, there have been several baptisms.

I rejoice and give thanks for the congregations, the pastors, and the people who are stepping up in faith to reach out to emerging cultures in their midst!!

2) Current SWD Financials:

The latest SWD financials are attached; viz. the congregation intentions as well as the Statement of Activities. If you pay attention to such things and I pray that you do our SWD is operating well within its budget. I give thanks for the pastors and the congregations for their generosity. I also thank our gracious Lord for the SWD staff that works hard, accomplishing a great deal with the resources with which we are entrusted!

3) Planning for the 2016 LCMS National Convention:

The 65th annual convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod will be held July 9-14, 2016, In Milwaukee at the Wisconsin Center, 400 W. Wisconsin Ave. The theme is "Upon this Rock".

Word is that we will need somewhere between 350 and 400 volunteers to help man the convention. More information is available on our [website](#). The volunteer form is attached. Also at some point soon volunteers will be able to sign up using a sign up genius which will be linked to the website. Watch the website for updates! It's a great opportunity to see the LCMS at work up close and personal.

4) National Convention Assessment:

Herman tells me that the congregational assessments for the 2016 national convention will be sent out next week, and that they are just under \$2.00 per communicant member.

5) Congregational Visitation:

Most of our Circuit Visitors are aware that I am making the rounds to their congregation as part of President Harrison's visitation emphasis. In some cases I am preaching, in others I am meeting with their elders or main board. If you would like such a visitation so that God's people might have a greater appreciation of what we do together in SWD and the LCMS, please give Karen a call. She can

set up the date. I would love to come preach on a Sunday, get to know God's people and talk about our joint work of reaching the lost in this dark world.

6) Once again a word to the wise regarding Internal Reviews and/or External Audits:

An internal review or external audits are concepts that we are not taught at the seminary. But they are extremely important for the integrity of the finances for a congregation. I bring it up because not long ago I was once again at a congregation as they unpacked the facts surrounding an embezzlement of church funds. Usually the phone call from the pastor who has discovered embezzlement begins, "I know that you have warned us, but..."

Please it is about the integrity of the financial process and about protecting the reputation of all who handle funds. Please have your boards do an internal review or external audit. It is work; but it may just save you and your congregation a lot of tears and consternation. It is true that an external audit may have a cost, but how much is a good reputation worth? King Solomon comments: A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. [Proverbs 22:1]

7) Joint North/South Wisconsin Circuit Visitors Meeting:

The Circuit Visitors from both districts will meet at the Holiday Inn, Stevens Point, WI on February 22-23, 2016. Rev. Ted Kober, Ambassadors of Reconciliation will be the presenter. The agenda will be coming out soon, just a note that we will be starting earlier on Monday at 10 and ending at 2 on Tuesday (which is slightly different than in previous years). Circuit Visitors if you have not already registered with Karen and chosen a roommate please do so as soon as possible.

8) Pre-Retirement Workshop- April 9, 2016 at the District Office:

As we have in the past, we are again hosting a Pre-Retirement workshop on Saturday, April 9, 9 am-3 pm at the district office with lunch provided. Mr. Paul Snyder from Concordia Plan Services will present a 1-day workshop for professional church workers and their spouses to help them understand the process and importance of planning for retirement. More information and details will be sent out as the time gets closer; however if you are interested but can't attend in April, we will be having it again in September. Watch for more details.

9) My calendar highlights for the next few weeks:

- 1/21 Risen Savior Franklin Call Committee
- 1/22 Congregational Visitation Berea Lutheran
- 1/24 Preach at Community of Life Oregon
- 1.25-27 Multi-ethnic Symposium Concordia St. Louis
- 1/28 St. John, Random Lake
- 1/30 Passionate Believers Work Conference at Divine Redeemer Hartland
- 1/31 Clergy Call and Roster Committee meeting

[A sub-committee of the COP which I chair, this is akin to a governance committee. Also on this committee are Presidents Terry Forke of Montana District, Mark Miller of CID, and Rev. Lane Seitz (retired) who serves as our consultant.]

- 2/1-5 Council of Presidents Winter meeting, Destin, Florida
[I didn't plan the location. Last year the swimming pool had a sheet of ice on it.]
- 2/7 Preach at Mount Olive MKE and install Adam Sorenson as a missionary to Ethiopia. This is a great and humbling honor!!
- 2/9-10 LCMS Hearing Panel, Pennsylvania
- 2/11 SWD Board of Directors
- 2/11-13 Concordia St. Louis Board of Regents
[I was elected by the COP to represent them on this important board.]
- 2/14 Preach at Hope MKE as the congregation meets to extend a call for its next pastor
- 2/15 Circuit 25/26 Winkel at Union Grove

10) Calls and Vacancies:

Pastor calls & vacancies

- Beloit – Messiah (evaluating, currently served by an intentional interim)
- Cedarburg – First Immanuel (associate)
- Franklin – Risen Savior (evaluating)
- Grafton – St. Paul (associate)
- Mayville – St. John (senior, currently served by an intentional interim)
- Milwaukee – Hope (ready to extend a call)
- Milwaukee – Oklahoma Ave. (evaluating)
- Random Lake/Batavia – Immanuel & St. Stephen
- Sheboygan Falls – St. Paul (associate)
- Wales – Bethlehem (evaluating)
- Wauwatosa – Our Redeemer
- Wauwatosa – Pilgrim

Pastors considering a call

- Brian Krueger, Austin MNS to Random Lake/Batavia – Immanuel & St. Stephen
- David Gehne, Trinity Racine to St. John's Indianapolis, IN

Pastors accepting a call

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Pastors declining a call

- Thayer Benson – Redeemer, Peoria, Illinois to Our Redeemer, Wauwatosa
- Robert Goodwin – Grace, Menomonee Falls, to Our Savior, Palm Springs, California

11) SWD Prayer List:

- Dennis Schueler as he is now home after surgeries and cancer treatments
- Laurie Ahlborn, wife of Marv as she has been diagnosed with cancer

May our Lord bless!!

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Confessing Christ for the Next Generation

*It is time for us to be distinctly Lutheran, to plant new churches, to honor our vocation,
and to embrace our communities.*