

PRAYER

Lord, we praise You this morning for the blessings of good weather and for the fertility of the land upon which we dwell. We praise You for the sun that shines upon our endeavours and for the moon and the stars at night which remind us of your glory. We thank you for the many good things that You have bestowed upon us. Most of all, O Lord, we thank You for your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, who came to deliver us from the power of sin and death by dying upon the cross for us. We praise You for raising Him up in glory and for appointing Him as the judge of both the living and the dead.

Help us, O God, to have a heart that exalts in Your grace and goodness, lips unafraid to proclaim Your praise before all people, and minds which are focused on living according to Your glorious and living word. We ask it through Christ Jesus our Lord who taught us to pray, saying:

UNDERESTIMATING GOD

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-9

Do you remember watching Superman as a young child?, His alter ego was Clark Kent, a mild-mannered reporter for the *Daily Planet* newspaper. Working for a news organization allowed the Kryptonian to interact with the people he was protecting and to hear about situations that may have required his super attention. The Clark Kent persona would also allow for comic relief. Not knowing they were talking to Superman, people would often underestimate Kent and say things to him they would never say to the Man of Steel. It was all the sillier because Superman's "disguise" was a pair of horned rim glasses. How was anyone fooled? With all Superman's power, you would think he could come up with a better disguise! Or, at least he could spend the cash for some hipster designer lenses.

The way people underestimate the disguised Superman is similar to how people underestimate God. However, when we underestimate God, it is not always funny or cute. Sometimes we think about God as if He is less than what He is. We think about Him like He is capable of cruelty and neglect. We think about Him as if He were not good. When things are going our way, we sing God's praises. But when our situation is challenging, we question God's ability to deliver us. Why do we underestimate God? And more importantly, how do we stop?

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, commemorating the day when Jesus, on a mountain, revealed evidence of His deity to three of His closest friends. On that day, Jesus shone brighter than the sun and showed that He was more than just a

good teacher. He was and is something far greater. From a theological standpoint, the Transfiguration, as we call it, is important for us because it helps us understand Christ's nature, fully God and fully human. However, I believe there is more to the Transfiguration. I believe the story of the Transfiguration can help us avoid underestimating God. Let's look at the Mark's version of the transfiguration story. *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. (Mark 9:2-9)*

For the purpose of this message, I would like to focus on Peter's response. Prior to this story, Peter had one of his best moments. In [Mark 8:29](#), Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, knowledge only God could reveal. It was a huge spiritual victory for Peter. Less than a week later, on that mountain, Peter is getting yelled at by a cloud! I love Peter, and I do not think I am better than the apostle. But you really have to mess up if a cloud is needed to straighten you out! I have done some bad things, but nothing "cloud bad!" I am joking, of course. It was God speaking through the cloud. God had to lovingly and firmly correct Peter in that moment because his thinking was way off.

First, Peter called Jesus "rabbi." A week earlier, Peter called Jesus the Messiah. Now he is calling him "rabbi," or "teacher." Keep in mind, Peter is speaking as Jesus is shining and talking with two dead heroes of faith. How does one go from "Messiah" to "rabbi" in that moment? We will get back to this question.

Next, Peter proposed building three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. There was a belief in Peter's time that divine beings dwelled in tabernacles, or tents, and scholars believe Peter wanted to extend the Transfiguration phenomenon. He wanted to honour the three beings by creating places of habitation for them, which also facilitated the continuation of the experience. Peter had good intentions, but he was "cloud wrong." Peter was inadvertently putting Elijah and Moses on the same level as Jesus. Perhaps he saw Christ as a great prophet like Moses and Elijah. Without meaning to do so, Peter had diminished Jesus in his own eyes. He underestimated the Son of Man as his Lord and Saviour and he somehow imagined the Eternal Son would be pleased to stay in a tent made by human hands.

Again, how did Peter go from acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah to underestimating him in less than a week? In verse 6, Mark gives us important information about Peter's state of mind. Peter "did not know what to say, for they were terrified." Peter and his companions were afraid, and rightly so! After seeing Jesus shining and two dead guys walking around, I would have set the world record for fastest descent of a mountain! At least Peter stayed on the mountain, and I give him credit for that. However, Peter felt a type of fear that compelled him to speak. It was not just the primal terror that triggers our flight response. Some other type of fear was working in Peter that drove him to insert himself into the Transfiguration. We do not know what was going through Peter's mind, but perhaps he felt he would be punished if he did not show the proper respect to Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Perhaps Peter thought Jesus needed to be reminded that the three disciples were there so they would not accidentally be incinerated by Christ's power. Whatever the reason, Peter's fear became greater than the image of Christ in his mind.

I am not picking on Peter, because all of us do the same thing. For example, if someone we care about becomes seriously ill or if our car unexpectedly needs a costly repair, it is natural to be anxious or afraid. However, if we are not careful, we can allow that anxiety or fear to spiral into worry. If the worry goes on long enough, the fear can cause us to accuse God of being cruel, uncaring, distant or some other negative adjective because He is "allowing us to go through this." "If He loved me," we might reason, "He would protect me from this hardship." We end up underestimating God's goodness and his ability to deliver us.

I wish I could tell you that my relationship with God is not affected by my circumstances, but I cannot. I sometimes allow my situation to determine my perception of God's goodness. I let my problems affect my belief in God's ability to save me. I make my fear a false god and allow it to erode my trust in Jesus. Ironically, the more I give in to fear and worry, the less I am inclined to bring my problem to God, the one who could actually help me. I somehow allow myself to believe the great Creator of heaven and earth, the one who holds all things together, the one who puts the very breath in my lungs, is weak. Lord, have mercy on me and anyone else who falls into that trap!

During the Transfiguration, when Peter underestimated Jesus, God told him, "***This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!***" In calling Jesus His Son, the Father is establishing Christ's equality with Himself. In speaking of His love for Jesus, the Father is stating His unity with the Son. In other words, the Father told Peter that Jesus is the Creator and the Almighty. Jesus is the one who caused the stars to shine and seas to roar. Jesus is the one who raised the mountains. Jesus caused the birds to sing and the flowers to bloom. Jesus created humanity in His image, and

by His active will, puts air in our lungs, providing the very breath Peter used to underestimate Him. We know the passage:

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col. 1:16b-17

God instructs Peter to listen to this Jesus, the real Jesus, not the Jesus of his corrupted imagination. Peter should have rejected the Jesus of his fear and bowed down before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He should not have presumed to know anything and looked to Christ to show him how to think and be. God's admonition to Peter is important instruction for us as well. We cannot allow the circumstances of our lives to diminish Christ in our hearts. We can be so prideful, thinking we know what God should do, and when and how He should do it. And, when He does not do things the way we expect, we tend to judge Him and diminish our estimation of His greatness. Instead of submitting our will, emotions, and reason to Him, we sometimes treat God like He is a corrupted human being.

The Transfiguration reminds us that yes, Jesus is our friend and brother, and He is the first new human, but His unity with humanity does not rob Him of His majesty and divinity. Transfiguration Sunday should be a reminder that we cannot and should not underestimate our Saviour.

If we fully trusted Christ, we would never underestimate Him. Trusting Jesus involves not only believing in Him, but also having faith that God is giving us what we need. It is trusting in His perfect timing. It also means that we trust His leading and believe He will tell us what we need to do to join Him in the work that He is doing. Trusting God means following Him despite a lack of understanding and without the full picture. Most importantly, trusting God means being content with what we have, knowing that God would only deprive us of things we do not need or are harmful to us. Peter did not have full understanding what was happening on the mountain of Transfiguration, so he tried to interpret events for himself.

One way to keep ourselves from underestimating Jesus is to regularly put ourselves in a position to be overwhelmed by our great God. We need to put ourselves in the place where words fall short, the place where logic fails. We need to go to the place where all we can do is worship Him.

For some of us, music takes us to that place. Praise and worship music helps us draw nearer to God. Experiencing nature is another way to be filled with awe. When we immerse ourselves in creation, we cannot help but notice its beauty, symmetry, and glorious complexity. It will inevitably lead us to the feet of the Creator who prepared such a beautiful world for us. Commit to doing whatever it is that makes you feel overwhelmed with wonder and gratitude on a regular basis. We need to create a space for Jesus to be transfigured before our eyes.

After the voice from the cloud spoke to Peter, everything else disappeared. Moses, Elijah, and even the cloud faded away. Only Jesus was left. He is all we have, and He is all we need. His greatness cannot be overestimated. There is none like Him! Nothing else can satisfy like Jesus! No one else can save like our Lord! There is no greater love than that which flows from the heart of Jesus! Let us make everyday Transfiguration Sunday because Jesus is worthy of all praise!

LET US PRAY

Loving and gracious God, Lord of Hosts and Creator of all things, Your only Son was taken up into heaven and in power is seated at Your right hand, where He intercedes for all those whom You have called to Him in faith.

Open our eyes to You so we may understand the immeasurable greatness of Your power at work in us and in that strength let us do as Jesus commanded us to do.

Give us the wisdom and the power to go out and make disciples of all nations so that we can teach them those things He has revealed to us. Enable us to show forth in all that we do, the glory that You have bestowed upon us.

Lord of heaven and of earth, we pray for your Church. May we at Knox and all of Your children, hear the cry of those who are lost and, in Your name, show them the way of wholeness that You have prepared for them. We pray your blessings on the churches in those countries where Christianity is banned and where the faithful are persecuted.

We pray also this day for anyone afflicted with Covid 19. Give them peace and we ask that You would support and strengthen the medical profession who are caring for them.

Be with those who are home alone during this time. May they know Your love and Your care.

Almighty God, You who are the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega. We especially pray for those persons and those situations that You have put upon our hearts and minds this day.

Hear the special prayers that we now offer to You with the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts.

We ask these things, and we praise You and bless Your Holy name through Christ Jesus Your Son, and our Lord who taught us to pray saying: ***Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into***

temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and love and care for another in the name of Christ Jesus.

May the Spirit of God fill you and use you according to God's most Holy will.

May the Word of God fill your heart with joy and wisdom and patience.

May Christ dwell within you so that all your actions and words will be a witness to His unsurpassed grace and His transforming love.

This both now and forevermore.

Amen

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- In what ways is separation from Christ like being in the dark?
- In what ways does Jesus bring light?
- Can you think of a time when you underestimated God?
- Do you think Peter was wrong for wanting to extend the transfiguration experience?
- What makes you feel in awe of God? How can you encounter that on a regular basis?