

Preparatory Service - Summer Communion 2025

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

[0 : 00] So this passage that we're open at tonight, it's one of these parts of the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Synoptic Gospels as they're known.

It's one of these passages that has a common structure in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. And that is itself quite an interesting feature. It's quite, I think, probably quite an important feature. It's quite a deliberate feature of the narrative.

You know, all of the Gospels will have different aspects of the life and the ministry of Jesus, and sometimes they'll have them in slightly varying order. Sometimes there'll be some confusion. Are they actually talking about exactly the same incident?

There's the blind men that are at one side or the other of Jericho as Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. Are there two blind men, or is there just Bartimaeus? Is that on the way into Jericho? Is it on the way out of Jericho?

And you've got that sense of the authenticity that comes from different eyewitnesses recording their recollections of these events.

[1 : 15] And that lends itself to the authenticity of Scripture because of that particular feature of it. There's some features that are just identical in all the Gospels. Obviously, the crucifixion is the focus of all of the Gospels, and so that comes at a particular point.

It's followed by the burial of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, and we'll be looking at some of that tomorrow. But this evening, what we're looking at is this incident called the Transfiguration, where Jesus is transformed before the disciples.

And before we get really into that part of the passage, we need to see that in all of the Synoptic Gospels, the context is always the same.

The context is this passage just before in chapter 8, where in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, they record the same teaching of Jesus. And there's slight variations, again, in the wording.

Again, lends itself to that variation of eyewitness accounts. But the emphasis in all of them is the same. That Jesus has this remarkable phrase that's really striking to us about the cost of discipleship.

[2 : 24] That being a follower of Jesus means we have to take up our cross, in some versions it's daily, and follow him. And so there's a cost.

Jesus saying these words in that original context was one where crucifixion was not something unknown to the disciples. It wasn't something that was alien to them. It was a very serious, weighty statement to make, in fact.

Because it's really a death sentence. It's giving up your life. That's what actually happens in the process of crucifixion. It forces the life out of you.

And Jesus is saying, if you're going to be a follower of mine, then this is the reality. You are giving up the life you had.

You are giving up the life that you knew. And you are obeying my call. A call which was common to the disciples. You remember as Jesus called each one of the disciples.

[3 : 23] He used these same words, follow me. And it's the same call that today comes to each and every one of us. An invitation to be disciples of Jesus.

To follow in the footsteps of our master. To go the way he went. To walk the path that he has called for us to walk on. Which is a path which, for each one of us, might be quite different in its own features.

But takes us, as believers, to the same destination. To the goal and the prize of that upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That we would be with him for all eternity.

And part of that is the destination that Jesus has in mind. It's one where we'll see him. You see it in Jesus' high priestly prayer, John 17. Father, I wish that those whom you have given me may be with me.

That they may see me. And it's interesting that John, we'll look at this tomorrow night. But John telling us part of the reason for his gospel. The reason John writes everything. Is so that we will see Jesus.

[4 : 24] That we will see his glory. And tonight, we're starting to think about that seeing of Jesus. At this point of the transfiguration.

And seeing why it really matters for us to be good disciples. And so tonight, I'm very deliberate. This is thinking about our preparation.

The question. To come to the Lord's table tomorrow. What must we do to prepare ourselves to come to the Lord's table? And that question, it doesn't matter if you have been coming to the Lord's table as a member of the church for decades.

Maybe tomorrow you'll be coming to the Lord's table. Maybe tomorrow you'll be coming to the Lord's table perhaps for the hundredth time in your life. Maybe, I don't know if it's possible, the thousandth time. I don't know. Some people are very old and they've been members for a long time. It's possible. Maybe tomorrow, at the moment, you're thinking to yourself, I'm going to be sitting at the back. Quite deliberate in that.

[5 : 29] Thinking, I do trust in the Lord. I'm a believer. But I don't have the assurance to go to the Lord's table. And whichever one of these categories you're in, or whatever you are, on a sort of sliding scale between these two points, the solution for what we must do is to examine ourselves as to our perceiving and understanding the body of the Lord.

Do we see Him? Do we see what He has done for us? Do we see the importance of what He has done? Do we see who He is? Do we see the miracle of the new birth through Him for our salvation and for our blessing?

And that's where the disciples were. Jesus is telling them, there's a cost to being a disciple, but you need to follow me. And then He takes Peter and James and John up the mountain.

And He tells them beforehand, this is what's going to happen. It's written in code, in the way Jesus often speaks. He's very deliberate with what He says. Some of you standing here will not taste death until you see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

And scholarly reference kind of generally says that's a reference to what's actually going to happen that week. That Jesus is going to go with some of the disciples up the mountain.

[7 : 03] And they're going to see the power of the kingdom. They're going to see the power of God because Jesus Himself is going to visibly wear the radiance of God.

He's going to be transformed into a glorious appearance and show them His divine majesty. That divine majesty that lies at the heart of the kingdom.

The King's glory around which we are gathered. So Jesus leads the disciples up the mountain. They go up. A cloud overshadows them. There's the radiance of Jesus that is transfigured before them.

And there are two other people up here. Moses and Elijah. And so what I want to do tonight is just stop and take a look at Moses and Elijah. And why they're here.

And what that tells us. And then to ask what does that mean for us. As we would be with Jesus. And as we would see Him as well.

[8 : 06] So first of all there's Moses. Now the common thinking about Moses is the reason that Moses and Elijah appear is that Moses is the lawgiver. So the Jews when they thought about the Old Testament they really had three principal sections.

You had the law. You had the wisdom material. And you had the prophets. And so the thinking is that Moses is the chief of the ones giving the law.

The books of the Torah come from Moses. And Elijah similarly. Although Elijah doesn't write a book of prophecy. Elijah is presented in the book of Kings as the sort of archetypical leader of the prophets.

He's the one who calls Israel back to covenant fidelity and faithfulness with God. The great highlight of Elijah's ministry really being Mount Carmel. Where the sacrifice is laid on the altar.

And he pours the buckets of water over it. And then he prays to the Lord and calls down to the people. And says to the people choose this day whom you will serve. And the people say well we

will serve the Lord. Because the fire of God comes down from heaven and consumes the sacrifice. [9 : 07] And so Elijah is held up on this kind of pinnacle as the chief of the prophets. Moses the chief of the lawgivers. And so the law and the prophets are represented as attesting to Jesus here.

And that's certainly the case. But what's really interesting is to stop and pause. And think about who these two men were.

Moses is quite an interesting one. We all know the story. You know the story about Moses begins with his birth in a remarkable situation.

The Pharaoh has said the male children of the Israelites, the Hebrews, are to be slain at birth. And Moses' parents resolving to keep the child alive.

Resolve that they will put him in a basket in the river. And you remember the story. The daughter of Pharaoh is bathing down on the side of the river. And discovers the basket. Recognizes that this is a Hebrew child.

[10 : 10] But says I'm going to save this child. And Moses' sister who is nearby says I'll go and find a nurse for you to raise the child. She goes and finds her mother. So Moses' own mother gets to bring up her child.

And the safety and the protection of the Egyptian royal family. And Moses is brought up then within that family. And one day he is remembering his heritage.

He's out in the fields. And he sees an Egyptian beating one of his countrymen. And Moses murders the Egyptian.

And he hides the body. Thinks he's gotten away with it. And shortly thereafter he finds two Israelites, two Hebrews arguing. And thinks he can resolve this.

And it becomes apparent that his crime. For it was a crime. His crime has been discovered. And Moses in great terror flees.

[11 : 16] And hides himself away. Runs from Egypt. Goes off into the Sinai Desert. Gets married to a pagan priest's daughter.

And one day has a remarkable experience. He's out tending his flocks. And he sees something peculiar.

A bush burning. Not itself unusual in the Sinai Desert. That these things would happen quite instantly. Creosote bushes just burst into flames. But this one's different.

Because the flame doesn't burn out quickly. As you'd expect. And he goes to investigate. And as he creeps towards the bush.

He hears a voice speaking to him. It's the voice of God. Speaking from out of the bush. And says to him. Moses put off your sandals. For the ground where you're standing is holy ground.

[12 : 15] And we know the story. How he's commissioned by the Lord. To go back to Pharaoh. And to say to Pharaoh. The Lord God says let my people go. And Moses again is terrified.

He's a weak man. He's a shy man. He has character flaws obviously. And he's done bad stuff. He feels completely unworthy. For this task.

This calling of God. To go and do this duty. And yet the Lord continues to speak to him. The Lord gives him his covenant name. Tell them. I am has sent you.

That's who's commissioned you. That's who's given you the authority. That's what right you have. To deliver this message. And that continues throughout the life of Moses.

So Moses is wanting to lead. We're not wanting to. But he leads the people of Israel. Out of the slavery in the land of Egypt. Leads them across the Red Sea. Takes them into the Sinai Desert. Leads them to Mount Horeb.

[13 : 12] And there. At Mount Sinai. He presents to them. Or presents them rather to God. The people. And God speaks to them out of the mountain. Reveals himself. The people are quaking in terror.

And they say to Moses. Just don't ever let God speak to us himself again. You go and speak to God on our behalf. And if God has anything to say to us. You go and hear from him. And tell us. And so Moses goes.

And he spends all that time with God up on the mountain. And his face. Because he's been in the presence of God. When he comes back down. His face is radiant. So much so that he has to wear a bag over his head.

The rest of his days. Because he's been in the presence of God. And the people are terrified. By the transformed visage of Moses. And that's Moses.

Who's now on the mountain with Jesus. And I think it's really interesting. Quite simply to say. He's attesting to Jesus.

[14:10] And the power. And the authority of Jesus. As the word of God. As John calls him. That Jesus is the ultimate law giver. Of a higher power than Moses.

Moses. And yet. For these disciples. Who are up on the mountain. And who. Somehow supernaturally. It's revealed to them. This is Moses. That they're. Hearing. Speaking to. Perhaps they identify Jesus. Perhaps addresses him by name. But they realize. This is Moses. Moses. What's remarkable is. Moses is a man like us.

Moses isn't. Held up as being a super disciple. Who's a saint. And really good and holy. Moses is a murderer. And a weakling.

And an excuse maker. And he's short tempered. And at times he's full of wrath. At times he doesn't rely on God. At times you know the story of Moses.

[15:08] At times he takes matters into his own hands. And he himself has many lessons to learn. He's not perfect. And yet.

The remarkable thing is. God. Uses. Moses. To be at the pinnacle. Of giving. The law. And now here he is with Jesus.

On the Mount of Transfiguration. And the disciples have been told by Jesus. Take up your cross daily and follow me. How do we do that?

Well Moses is a burning example. Of how we do that. We don't rely on ourselves. We don't kind of stood ourselves up.

And psych ourselves up. To be good disciples. And to say to ourselves. Well I'm worthy to be a disciple. Or to say to ourselves. I'm good enough to go to the Lord's table. Or to say to ourselves. I'm good enough to be a disciple.

[16:08] In anything about myself. Everything of me. Is weak and worthless. I bring nothing.

To the table. But God. Who is rich in mercy. Takes a broken man like Moses. Filled with the Holy Spirit.

And uses him. Powerfully. And for us to be disciples of Jesus. For us to be able to sacrifice.

Our lives. To lay down our lives. Following Jesus. Means we need to have something of what Moses had. Not his skills.

Not his royal upbringing. But to have his vision. He saw God. And that's what Jesus is doing with the disciples.

[17:09] He's saying you need to see Jesus. And the question for us tonight. As we go to the Lord's table. Is have we seen Jesus?

Have we discerned him? Have we seen him in the wonder of his glory? Have we realized the glory of Jesus in the gospel?

The glory of Jesus as the one who takes us. Despite our grave sin. And who just as he did with Moses. I mean Moses must have understood this acutely.

When he's shown the tabernacle. When he's shown the day of atonement. When he's shown the temple. For how sin is dealt with. Moses must not have been sitting there.

Thinking about other people's sins. But he's thinking about his own sin. And how the blood of the sacrifice. Is needed to cover him. How he needs a Passover lamb.

[18:12] To be slain. A perfect lamb to be slain. In his place. How he's looking forward to one day. That being fulfilled.

That purpose of God. And the salvation that's offered. And now here he is in the Mount of Transfiguration. Conversion with Jesus. Isn't it fascinating? That this is the point. It's like the midpoint in the gospel.

Where the trajectory of Jesus. Has increasingly been locked in. The disciples have just said. You are the Christ. And Peter's busy saying.

Well you know. You're not going to Jerusalem. You're not going to die. You've got so much more to offer. You've got so much good to do. There's so much ministry. You can be getting on with.

And yet here. Moses is with Jesus. And as they conversed. On the Mount of Transfiguration. I do wonder. Is this some of what they conversed about? But the sacrifice. Of the lamb.

[19:07] Who is to be slain. For the sin of the world. And Moses conversing with his Savior. About what is to be seen. Moses was made great.

He was a disciple. Who was able to do great things. In God's service. Not because he was himself great. But because he saw the Lord. And he was transformed. Because he saw Jesus. The other one is Elijah. And again Elijah. You think. Well he's there. Because he's the pinnacle of the prophets. And that's almost certainly the case. He's this archetype. Of what a good prophet is meant to be. And he sees. You remember. This amazing success. He's called in. During the reign of Ahab. He's called by God. To go to Ahab. And say there'll be no rain in the land. Until you repent. Until you realize. That you've wronged God. And it's a message. [20 : 06] Not just for Ahab. But for the people. Because Ahab's their representative. He's the king. And so the people need to heed this. And. We tend to think about Elijah. In terms of the climax of his ministry.

Which actually comes right at the beginning. It's right at the beginning. Of the story of Elijah. He calls the people to Mount Carmel. Well. It's this wonderful story. But before that actually. There's been stuff going on with him. He's been led. After he delivers the message to Ahab. Ahab wants to kill him. And so Elijah. He goes and hides. The Lord takes him. To the Kishon Brook. And feeds him there. Supplies him morning and evening. With bread and meat. Supplied by ravens. And then after Mount Carmel. You kind of think. Well that must have made Elijah feel great. I mean there he is. He's just amazing. You know you think. Think about you know. Just the confidence he must have had. Having seen an answer to his prayer. Fire. Fall from heaven. Consume the sacrifice on the altar. [21 : 02] You must think. Oh man. You know. How much confidence could you have as a Christian. How much assurance could you have as a Christian. Having seen such an incredible thing. And then you think.

Well. Elijah's never going to have any doubts. The rest of his days. Is he? He's going to go on in confidence. And he's going to go on in boldness. And he's going to do great things in God's service. But the next chapter. What's he doing? He's terrified. That Ahab's wife. Jezebel is out to get him. And he runs off to hide. And not just does he run off to hide. But he's exhausted. With the terror that's overwhelmed him. And he actually says to God. I am so fed up. Just. I just want to die. Things are so hard. For me as a believer. I just want to die. And the angel of the Lord comes to him. The angel of the Lord is Jesus. In a pre. Incarnation. [22 : 01] Appearance. And the angel of the Lord says. Get up. Eat. Be fed and nourished. And go. To Mount Horeb. So he heads off down into the Sinai desert.

And there. There's. A mighty wind. Blows past him. As he's standing in the cave. And the Lord isn't in the wind. And there's a fearsome earthquake. And the ground trembles. And again. The Lord is not in the earthquake. And there's a huge storm. And engulfs him. And the hail and the rain. Lashes down upon him. The Lord isn't in the mighty storm. And then comes that still small voice. Where Elijah. Converses. With almighty God. And hears the Lord speaking. You read about it in 1 Kings. I think it's 17. The Lord speaks to him. [23 : 09] He hears. The voice of God. And he is emboldened. And encouraged. And he's reminded. That there are still. Many thousands of other people in Israel.

Who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And he's encouraged to go on. And so we look at Elijah. Don't we? And so often we tend to think. Well wasn't he such a wonderful prophet? He was suicidal. In his apparent feeling of failure. And destitution. And inadequacy. Before the Lord. I don't know. If that's you tonight. Maybe tonight that's how you're feeling. You've seen. Great things in your past as a Christian. Perhaps as a young Christian. You saw amazing transformational things in your life. Perhaps you saw the hand of God moving immensely in your experience. [24 : 10] But today you're saying to yourself. I don't know how to go on as a disciple. I don't know how to be. I don't know how to be refueled. And re-energized in God's service. I'm tired.

I often use my mom as an illustration like this. Because I think my mom is like this a wee bit. She's. You know through her life.

She's seen. As many of you have. The death of Christian Britain. She's seen our society. Lose. Its biblical foundations.

And she feels. Displaced. Displaced. Like what's. How does the world even work today? Where's the gospel gone in our society?

Our parliaments just voted to pass into law. Assisted suicide. We're starting to see the crumbling of so many of these institutions. That have upheld the Christian foundation for what makes our society tick.

[25 : 09] Where is this going? Lord, why am I even here? Why? Why? And we need to be like Elijah.

We need to hear and see our God. We need to listen to the voice of the Father that speaks out of the cloud and says, This is my beloved Son.

Hear Him. And so tonight, for us as disciples, as we go to the Lord's table, it's necessary for us to examine ourselves.

Not to see what's going on in us. Because we might be murderers like Moses. We might be absolutely despising life like Elijah.

When we're called to examine ourselves in the New Testament, it's not about looking at us. It's not about looking at ourselves.

[26 : 18] It's about looking at Jesus. It's about hearing Jesus. It's about stopping and pausing over this question.

Has He spoken to us? Has He shown Himself in all of His glory? Has He revealed Himself as a faithful Savior to us?

And what partly inspired me to preach on this theme, and we'll be looking at this all weekend, is this idea of wanting to see Jesus. It's what's written on this pulpit. The words of the Greeks who came wanting to see Jesus.

That's what we need. That's what we need as we go to the Lord's table. And so tonight, you might be feeling shy or destitute. You might be feeling your inadequacies.

You might be sure that there are much better Christians than you. And maybe there are. But the remedy to our weakness, the necessary thing for our discipleship to thrive and flourish, for us to be fed and nourished, for us to grow, for us to have obedience, for us to have the boldness that takes up our cross daily to follow Jesus, is not found in ourselves.

[27 : 54] But it's found in Christ. It's found looking at His cross and seeing what He did there. It's found looking at His empty tomb and seeing that He's no longer there.

It's found in looking forward to His return because one day He will come again as He promised. It's found in looking to Jesus. So will you be like the disciples tonight?

Is that what you're hungry for in your life as a Christian?

Is that what you want to have? There's one little warning for us in the passage and I'll finish on this note. Peter is there.

You know? And it's really interesting. Peter is probably the source for Mark's gospel. So Mark principally relies on Peter as the eyewitness of these events.

[29 : 06] And Peter has given Mark this insight that Peter himself is terrified. And he blurts out, it's good for us to be here.

Let's make three tents. One for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. Let's just hang on to this moment. Peter is like that.

He's just been saying the same thing to Jesus. Jesus just told him, I have to go to Jerusalem and die. And Peter is saying, well, no, no, let's not. And Jesus rebukes him and says, get behind me, Satan. You're thinking about the wrong things.

And then he's up on the mount with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration and he's basically saying the same thing. Let's not go to Jerusalem. Let's just stay here. Because this is such a good place.

The remarkable thing is, you know, you read on a few chapters and Peter is transformed.

The Holy Spirit has come. The Holy Spirit has opened his eyes to see Jesus more fully than he ever did during Jesus' earthly ministry. And he stands up on the day of Pentecost and preaches Christ crucified.

[30 : 16] That's where we want to be tonight. With the Holy Spirit's blessing. Seen our King in all of his glory. And filled with boldness to obey him.

And to come and taste and see that he is good. And enjoy the good things that he has set before us. So let's bow in prayer just now and ask his blessing.

Heavenly Father, we thank you tonight for your grace towards us. We thank you that Jesus reveals his glory. That he is seen as glorious in all that he has done.

He takes broken sinners and uses them powerfully. And that's glorious. There was a glory in the way that you used Moses.

Despite all of his failings and all of his reticence and reluctance. It's a remarkable thing, Lord, that you did in his life. It's a remarkable thing that you did in the life of Elijah.

[31 : 20] Another man just like us prone to perhaps depression. Prone to feeling overwhelmed by the world that it seemed against him and against his God. And yet you used him and you transformed him so that you would have the glory.

And we know, Father, that you are inviting us tonight to the same experience. that if we would see Jesus, that we would be transformed and renewed.

And so we pray tonight, Father, for that clarity of the gospel in our lives. That we would see Jesus fully. And that we would be known by him. And that we would know him.

And that we would hear his words. And that we would be emboldened and refreshed continually in his service. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion just now. I mean, normally, this would be a close of a communion psalm. But, you know, we're thinking tonight about the glory of our King.

[32 : 29] And that nowhere, I think, more clearly comes out in the book of Psalms perhaps than the words at the end of Psalm 72, which we're going to sing just now, page 314 in the blue psalm book. His name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall.

Men shall be blessed in him, and blessed all nations shall him call. Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel. For he alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel.

And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity. The whole earth let his glory fill. Amen. So let it be.

Let's stand and sing these verses to God's praise.

Amen. In heaven blessed, all nations shall him call.

Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel.

[34 : 02] For he alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel.

And blessed be his glorious name, to all eternity.

The whole earth let his glory fill.

Amen. So let it be. Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and always.

Amen.