



CANADIAN LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

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CELEBRATION & THANKSGIVING

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SERMON BY REV. MARTIN JUNGE *Based on Matthew 17: 1-9, 14-18 (NIV)*

Grace and peace to you from God Our father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear sisters, dear brothers in Christ, the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ—Matthew 17—has always been a text which has inspired me a lot. We begin seeing Jesus on the top of the mountain, with some few of his disciples coming together to pray. And in the context of that, an event taking place which, let's say, allowed that the disciples were able to see the Lord in his plenitude. They grasped the divine nature of Jesus Christ. They grasped that this Jesus which they have been following is indeed the Son of God. That Jesus Christ stands in a line of continuity of God's journey with human beings in a particular way.

And so, their reaction as they lived this particular moment of revelation, of peace, of insight, of fulness—their initial reaction is quite understandable. *Let's stay here, let's build tents where we all can dwell, so that we can continue having and being exposed to this wonderful reality.* I can understand because who doesn't want to rest? Who doesn't want to enjoy peace in a lasting way? Who doesn't want to enjoy that close encounter with the divine, with God, in such a way? And yet, that question or that proposal of the disciples was probably again one of those misunderstandings of the disciples about what

Jesus is all about and what he came for, what Jesus was revealing from God the Father.

To me, the proposal of the disciples reminds me of two similar events at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and at the end of his being on earth. At the beginning when again it was not the top of the mountain but it was in a desert where he was tempted. *Why don't you eat? Why don't you make this to be yours?* And Jesus refused. The temptation to which Jesus was subject was about derailing him, having him thinking of his own interest, and therefore detaching him from God's mission in this world, which is about bringing life, salvation, liberation—Life in Abundance, as the Gospel of John speaks. And so, he stood fast.

At the end of his ministry, it is even more dramatic, when he is at the cross and one of the soldiers goes and says, *"Why don't you help yourself, if you are the one you say you are?"* And Jesus does not, because his mission is not about him. His mission is about the whole of creation, human beings being healed back to plenitude. The same here.

The Biblical account does not tell us what Jesus responded, what he said to the disciples. But the Biblical account tells us what happened afterwards. It tells us that Jesus, with his disciples, goes down to the valley again—to where the people are, to where the communities live, to where the people struggle with their lives, enjoy their lives, to where life is taking place. And even more.

The first encounter when returning to the valley is with a family which was suffering because of a child which was caught by a spirit and therefore falling all the time on the ground, at times into fire—and therefore, a child with a

disfigured face. And just look, we see then at the beginning of Matthew 17 a story about the transfigured face of Jesus Christ and just a few verses further, we hear about the disfigured faces of human beings—their brokenness, their pain, their suffering. And there Jesus goes. And there Jesus offers his ministry of healing—healing that boy from his illness.

To me, this is a powerful paradigm—a metaphor, if you want—of what the church is all about. Encountering the Lord in worship, prayer, sacraments, but not to retain this for itself, not to keep it behind closed walls, not to hold it there for personal enjoyment, but to be equipped into a mission of healing, of Life in Abundance to reach all. This is why Jesus goes down.

And this is the ellipse, if you want, the ellipses within which the church moves—celebrating, being nurtured, connecting with the deep sources of hope and wholeness as we listen to the word, worship God and celebrate the sacraments. And going out, going out there to where life is, our daily life, in order to support, to heal, to become a healing, reconciling presence, a presence of justice among people. It is the breathing of the church, taking in and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling. And we know that suffocation can happen both because you don't manage to breathe in, but also because you don't manage anymore to breathe out. So, a healthy church will always hold this breathing together—these two extremes, these two positions.

This is why in the Lutheran World Federation, among our member churches, we are keen to stress that participation in God's mission involves proclamation, service and standing publicly for issues of justice. That is the holistic mission into which God calls the church. Announcing the presence and the work of the

Triune God in our world, being out there serving those who need it first and standing for justice in our communities, in our contexts, in our nations.

I want to thank the Canadian Lutheran World Relief for being that expression of Lutherans in Canada, of being that expression of that divine exhalation, bringing healing to people's brokenness, meeting the disfigured face in Ethiopia, in Asia, in Latin America, in so many parts where Canadian Lutheran World Relief has seen the disfigured face and has understood it as its calling, resulting from experience of meeting the Lord in word and sacrament.

Indeed, I want also to express gratitude for how this has been always done in so close and smooth cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation. We have been working together, we have been moving mountains indeed. There are so many stories of healing, of wholeness, which we would be able to tell. And there's so much more waiting for us to be done, in this world which seems to become more fragmented, more violent, where the common ground seems to be dwindling and disappearing and where our ministry is about bringing people together, finding that common ground, for communities, for the whole community of states, for the human family to flourish together.

From the transfigured face of Jesus Christ to the disfigured face of those who are broken, marginalized, oppressed, who are suffering in life, this is where we stand, this is where we move.

May God continue inspiring Canadian Lutheran World Relief in its ministry. May it continue offering that gift which is stemming out of hope which we receive by faith, so that healing and Life in Abundance becomes a reality to those needing it first.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all our understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

MATTHEW 17: 1-9, 14-18 (NIV)

17 *After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*

⁴Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ¹⁵“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” ¹⁸Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.