

The Transfiguration of our Lord  
"Simply for the Joy of It"  
Matt. 17:1-9

How many of you enjoy watching the Olympics or something similar where you get to see people who are at the top of their game?

I do too.

Whether it's listening to a great preacher, or watching a movie with great acting and a great screenplay I just love watching people who are performing at the top of their craft.

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to do something I absolutely love.

The Marin and Kristofer and I, went to a PGA golf tournament, called the Northern Trust Open.

One of the golfers we saw was, Dustin Johnson, who in 2011, hit the longest drive of the year. 463 yards! Today on the tour he averages, averages over 300 yards a drive.

And when he hit that ball, I didn't think it was ever going to come down

When I golf, if I hit a good drive, it's usually when no one is watching.

So it's amazing to me, that these pros, can walk up to that tee,

with hundreds of people standing all around them and sometimes a million more watching on television, somehow, even with all that pressure, they manage to hit their best shots.

It reminded me, of watching former Olympic ice skater Michelle Kwan.

Even with all the pressure she faced it was always fun to watch her skate.

You could always see on her face, how much she loved what she was doing.

I still remember one interview, in which she explained one of the secrets to her success.

She told the reporter, how she tried not to focus on external rewards.

She said, "I'm not obsessed with winning a gold medal and I try not to focus on what other people are saying about me. If I did, the pressure would be unbearable."

"What seems to help me the most, what frees me to skate my best is to go out there and remember why I started skating in the first place to skate simply for the joy of it."

I think this illustration gives us a picture of the challenge we face every day.

Every day the joy of living, the joy that God has in store for us, is challenged.

It's challenged by the temptation to let other things steal our identity.

When we forget who we are in Christ and let ourselves get defined and measured and evaluated by standards of this world, our joy gets stolen, or slowly fades away.

Because when we look into the mirrors of this world, our self-image is always distorted.

It's like looking into one of those "Fun-House" mirrors at a Carnival. You see a lot of images, but none of them is really you.

Which brings us to our Gospel reading this morning. In this passage from Matthew, chapter 17, we hear the account of Jesus' transfiguration where Peter, James, and John hear and see, a revelation of who Jesus really is.

In the dazzling light, and in the voice from heaven, Jesus is revealed as the "Beloved, Son of God."

These three disciples see Jesus in all his glory and they are able to look back later, after his resurrection, and see the glory that God had in store for Him.

That's what Peter was writing about in today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading when he says,  
 "For Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father  
 when the voice came to him and saying,  
 "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased."  
 That was Peter's testimony of what he saw that day.

So far this morning I've been talking about the joy that God has in store for each one of us, the simple joy of living. And I've also talked about how easy it is for that joy to be stolen when we lose sight of who we really are. And this is where these two points connect with our Gospel reading:

The key to seeing yourself as you truly are,  
 begins with seeing Jesus as He truly is.

We see ourselves most clearly when we see Jesus most clearly.

Peter's testimony reminds us that Jesus is the "Beloved, Son of God."  
 This is the Beloved Son, who suffered, died, and rose again, so that we might have new life. And in Christ, we have been called "beloved children of God."

That's an identity that can never be stolen.  
 No matter what happens to you in this world,  
 hold on to the fact that you are deeply loved by God.

Many of the commentators at the Olympics talk about how terrifying it must be in those minutes just before an event that you have been training for years. Those who win are the ones who most successfully cope with that pressure and use it constructively.

Being a person, whose identity is secure in Christ,  
 is like beginning a race, knowing that you have already won the gold.  
 Knowing that the first prize is ours, sets us free to do our best.

And we can enter the race, “simply for the joy of it.”

In other words, a person doesn’t ever have to say, “I *should* be a better Christian.”

In fact, there is no such thing as a “better Christian.”

The only kind of Christian, is a forgiven sinner.

The truth is, that the more we see “who we truly are,” in Christ,  
the more we become like Christ.

That’s what the Apostle Paul writes about in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians,  
In chapter 3, Paul makes the connection between Jesus’ transfiguration  
and our discipleship when he says in verse 18,

“And all of us, with unveiled faces,  
seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror,  
are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Paul is saying,  
that the more we look at the transfigured Christ,  
the more we look at his glory, the more we are changed.

Isn’t that amazing to think about?

The more we look at God, and let our minds focus on the things of God,  
the more we become like God, from one degree of glory to another.

It’s like a marriage or a deep friendship.

People who are together for years, pick up each other’s mannerisms,  
their language habits their likes and dislikes.

In the same way, isn’t it amazing to think that we can actually experience the joy of Christ?

In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*,  
there is a scene where the Olympic athlete, Eric Liddle,  
is trying to explain to his sister, why he finds so much joy in running and competing:

He says to her: “When I run I feel God’s pleasure.”

He was doing what God had gifted him to do.

And the more Eric Liddle focused his eyes on God, the more he felt the joy of God’s presence.

The same thing happens to us, when we focus our eyes on God.

The more we worship together, the more we pray together,  
the more we study God’s word together, the more we will see Jesus.

And the more we see Jesus,

the more we will feel the joy of his presence, and be equipped to serve Him.

Our world is hungry for that kind of light.

And our neighbors need to see the glory of Jesus shining through you and me. Amen