Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day. "'Tis good Lord to be here. Your glory fills the night. Your face and garments like the sun shine with unborrowed light."

I'll bet you didn't know this, but it started in the Lutheran Church. Most other churches saw what the Lutherans were doing so they did it too. And today, this very day, in churches throughout the world most Christians are doing it. What? You ask. Celebrating the Transfiguration on the last Sunday after the Epiphany, that's what. The reasoning behind this celebration is really quite beautiful. This is the last Sunday before we enter the Lenten season, that 40 day journey toward Easter where we follow our suffering Savior to the summit of Golgotha and witness the price He paid for our sins. Today, in the Transfiguration we have a "sneak preview" if you will of who Jesus of Nazareth really is as His body is transfigured and the voice from heaven identifies Him as God's own Son while He converses with Moses and Elijah and the three disciples look on.

For many years Mary and I watched a show called "Sneak Previews" – started in 1975 by Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, movie critics from the Sun Times and the Tribune who ran clips from the latest movies and gave them the "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" review. The “aisle seats” were saved for Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration who didn’t see it on celluloid but first hand and they gave it a most enthusiastic "thumbs up." In fact, Peter would have been content to pitch a tent and stay there always with His Lord Jesus in all His glory and with Moses and Elijah. "It's good Lord to be here!" is his review. "Let's stay for the rest of the show!" is another way to put it.

But a "sneak preview" by its very nature is not the whole movie. You don't get the whole picture in a preview - just selected scenes; the best parts, enough to whet your appetite and make you want to pay the price of admission. The disciples had been given many glimpses into the power of Jesus and His true nature and identity. They had seen Him perform miracles. They knew He had the power to heal the sick and raise the dead - to drive out demons. They knew He was more than just a healer. They knew that Jesus had power from God Himself. Just a few days before the Transfiguration He had put them to the test. "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus had asked His disciples. "Some say Moses, some say Elijah, others say one of the prophets." But then looking straight at their hearts Jesus had asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's strong reply of faith was, "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God." Yes, even prior to this "sneak preview" they had known who Jesus was. They had heard his wisdom, they had
seen the miracles, they knew Him to be the Christ, the Messiah, but now on the Mount of Transfiguration, as if to crush any possible doubts they see Jesus in all of His heavenly glory. In the unearthly light with the voice of God coming forth to say, "This is my Son whom I love, listen to Him," they had their "sneak preview" of heaven.

Now, while Mary and I enjoy watching the reviews, our movie excursions are pretty much limited to what is playing at the Riverside or the Brooklyn 8 discount theaters that show Bollywood pictures later at night. Even if I really want to see a picture before the print is blurred and the sound is fuzzy I'm just not willing to plunk down $9 a ticket. It just costs too much to see a full price movie.

Price wasn't exactly the issue with the disciples. They had already paid a certain price for their following Jesus. They had left their families and sold their businesses in order to learn from this rabbi, but the price He would demand would be far more than that in the days just following the Transfiguration as they traveled to Jerusalem and Jesus journeyed to the cross. The leaders of their church would deny that Jesus was the Messiah. They would say He was sent by the devil to lead people away from the true faith. The people He had ministered to would ask Him to leave and go so far as throwing stones at Him. The Roman government would brand Jesus a troublemaker and subversive and take Him away and kill Him. Then the disciples would be left alone, alone to wonder, "Was he really the Son of God?" And Peter James and John after they came out of hiding and met the Risen Lord would be able to look back on their mountaintop experience and say, "Yes, He always was and is the Son of God." As they went out into the world to declare this after the resurrection and ascension the disciples would pay with their lives for this faith they confessed in Jesus.

But, at least they'd had a "sneak preview." Even those disciples who weren't on the mount of Transfiguration got to see their risen Lord in His glorified body. They'd had a sneak preview of what to expect. Have we? I remember at the height of the Jesus Movement in the '70s every Christian concert I went to seemed to feature a testimony - someone whose life had been drastically changed by an encounter with Jesus Christ. Many were saved from drug or alcohol abuse, some had testimonies about healing - physical and emotional. I tried to look back in my life for a "mountaintop" experience. I didn't have a date when I'd made a decision for God, though I did have the date of His decision for me, October 22, 1953 when I was baptized – that simple, eternity changing washing where God does the work – cleansing, redeeming, making each of us a Child of the Kingdom. Scripture tells us that before the world was formed God had each of us in mind to love us and that the angels in heaven rejoice when we receive God’s love and salvation.

We, like the disciples, like Jesus, come down from the mountaintop experiences of worship, of closeness to God, of remembrance of our baptism and the newness of life that is ours therein, come away from the strength we receive at the Lord's table, to go down into the valley to share God’s love, to put our hands to the work God has for us to do.
Jesus had to go down into the valley, because there was a man waiting there with his son. The son had been troubled by a demon all of his life. It threw him into the fire - made him injure himself. The 9 disciples who had been left behind had tried to cast out the demon but it wouldn't budge. Jesus came down from that mountain where he'd shown like the sun, where He'd conferred with Moses and Elijah and heard the voice of His Father, not only to cast the demon out of that boy but to go on to Jerusalem, where He would complete His mission and earn forgiveness for the world.

Peter, James and John wanted to pitch their tents and stay but they had to come down from the mountain to proclaim who Jesus was, to bear witness to others about what He had done, the salvation He had earned, and how this salvation, this power that had raised Him from the dead, had Transfigured Him on the mount, was available to all who would believe in Him. I can't help but think that their "sneak preview" of heaven at the Mt. of Transfiguration gave their witness incredible strength.

Peter would later write, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."(2PE 1:19) Don't you think he thought of the light of Jesus shining in the darkness of the night on that mountain whenever he spoke of "light in the darkness?" Don't you think in the darkness of prisons, when the reality of the resurrection seemed unreal compared to the dank and frightening reality surrounding him that Peter thought back to the light of Christ? James would meet Jesus face-to-face before any of the disciples as the first to be martyred, John would have to wait the longest, Peter, it seems would travel the farthest of these three spreading the news, giving others a "sneak preview" of heaven.

It's good to have "sneak previews" of heaven, isn't it? They happen on mountaintops as well as in valleys, but the important thing to remember is that whatever peak of faith experience you enjoy you can't stay there - at least not yet. Like Peter, James and John we are called to come back down the mountain. Like Peter, James and John you and I also have the privilege of being witnesses of God's great acts to those who are hurting, afraid, guilt-ridden, and dying today. By the way we love one another; by the way we show that love to the world, people will know that we are the Lord's disciples. Tell in your own words what you know Jesus from the Scriptures and of His goodness and grace to you in your lifetime. The Father's counsel is still to be given, "Listen to him!" Direct your relatives and friends to Him.

Give others a "sneak preview" of what life lived with and for Jesus is like. Pray with me for that courage and that grace.

Lord, if there are some here who have never seen Your glory, give them a taste of Your goodness. If there are some who reflect Your glory but dimly in their lives, kindle in their hearts a new flame of faith and love. Grant each of us Your grace, O Lord, to bring the good news of Your salvation to others. Grant us Your words and give us Your eyes to see their needs. And
whether in this life we stand on mountaintops or walk through valleys, give us a faith that is as constant and changeless as Your love for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. AMEN. "Tis good, Lord, to be here. Yet we may not remain. But since You bid us leave the mount. Be with us on the plain."