

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

What is your image of Jesus? When you picture Jesus in your mind, who do you see? Do you see him as a shepherd surrounded by contented sheep in an idyllic, pastoral scene? Do you see him wearing the garments of two thousand years ago or is dressed in blue jeans and a flannel shirt? If you see Jesus as a shepherd do you picture him with a sheep over his shoulders, all four legs loosely bound together in front of him as he has one hand on the bind and the other on his staff, as he climbs a rugged, stone and briar filled hillside? Do you see Jesus on the clouds, perhaps ascending to the Father? Or do you see him on clouds coming back in judgment? Do you picture Jesus as he is on the mountaintop, garbed in dazzling white with a shining face, with Moses and Elijah on either side? Or do you picture Christ crucified?

When you think of Jesus, do you think of him as kind, gentle, loving Savior, smiling all the while as you fall, even as you turn from him? Do you think of him as a good man who was a wonderful teacher, who lived his life as an example to us all? Do you think of him as the Son of God, or is that really hard to wrap your thoughts around? After all, who has seen God? Who has seen Jesus? If you see him as Son of God, as Savior, what does it mean to you? Head knowledge or heart knowledge? You know that he died for you and you believe in him, that the belief we call faith is a gift.

Well where do you get the image that you have about Jesus? Where do you get your knowledge of him? Is it from the stories you heard from your parents, teachers, grandparents, pastors when you were young? Is it from reading the Bible? Is it from listening to the pastor on a Sunday morning? All these things? Then the question what do you do with this knowledge? Is it in your heart? Do you take it seriously? Is it a way of life? Are you a disciple, a "student follower" of Jesus?

Let's think about this. This morning Jesus is on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah. The first one brought the Law from God to the people of Israel and the second was the greatest of the prophets. Law and Prophets represented – two of the main parts of the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Jesus fulfills the Law and is the fulfillment of prophecy. It is a mountaintop experience and it's so easy to believe on the mountaintop. It's so easy to believe when you are part of something exciting – a new mission church, joining a church, celebrating 50 years of existence. It is so easy to believe when you are on the mountaintop. But then you come back down from the mountain, you come back down to the plains. Gotta make a living, gotta get the kids to school, gotta get out to the fishhouse, gotta get to Arizona, gotta never seems to stop! You say that you are a Christian, a Lutheran, a disciple. You say you are a believer, that is, you believe in Jesus, that he is the Son of God. You say you want to hold to our traditions. Of course our traditions go back two thousand years and even more considering our Jewish ancestors. Now one of our most hallowed and cherished traditions happens to be a command of Christ. Baptism of course. Go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Another of our most hallowed and cherished traditions is another command of Christ. Holy Communion. It is a tradition that hundreds of millions of Christians celebrate weekly, that Martin Luther said he would do every day if given the

chance. Two visible signs of the Word of God, baptism and the Lord's Supper, done at Christ's command, conveying forgiveness of sin, the grace of God.

Let us now talk about another tradition, cherished by billions of Christians over the past two thousand years. That is hearing the Word of God proclaimed. Faith comes by hearing and what is heard comes from the Word of God, according to the Apostle Paul. So let us go back to that mountaintop, Jesus, Moses, Elijah. Peter, James and John were there too. But they are weighed down with sleep. We too have been weighed down with sleep and it's time to wake up. It's time to hear the voice of God the Father when he tells us: "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!" "Listen to him!" This is a present imperative if you want to get technical, which means it never stops. It's a command, an imperative, it is imperative that we obey. Like Baptism, like Holy Communion, celebrated how many billions of times by how many billions of Christians over two thousand years. Listen to Jesus. And what does Jesus tell us? The primary commandment is to love God and the second like it, on which the Law and the Prophets depend, love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus loved us enough to die for us. Can you love one another, this body of Christ, can you love Christ enough to die for one another, to die for Christ? Can you love enough to put aside your doubts, your fears, your wants, your self-perceived needs to do what you think is the best thing, when it goes counter to the Word of God, when it goes counter to mission, when it goes counter to our purpose in life? Can you love your neighbor enough in spite of your personal beliefs/convictions, can you love your neighbor enough to get out of the way of his or her following God as God as calling him or her in this congregation? Can you pray for the success in mission of this part of the body of Christ, even if you cannot financially support it? Can your pray that those who can give abundantly will do so, not begrudging them their gift of giving? Can you serve your brothers and sisters by praying for them? Can you extend the hand of fellowship even when you do not agree? Can you get out of the way if that is what is needed? Can you hear Jesus now? Can you hear God telling you, telling us, to listen to him?

You can if you listen with your heart.

AMEN