

Transfiguration

2 Peter 1:16-21

January 24, 2021

As the sun sets, the church's prayers reflect on the coming night: In *Evening Prayer*, "Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.... Let Your light scatter the darkness and illumine Your Church." The prayer of the disciples in Luke 24, as they near Emmaus, became a beloved evening hymn: **"Abide with us, Lord, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."**

Ideology follows anthropology. So does theology. Anthropology—what you say about man, and the condition of the world—will determine what solutions are available.

A positive anthropology—namely, that man has it in himself to improve—leads to a theology that emphasizes free will and redemption through good works. Your choices and your efforts will make yourself and the world better.

But the Bible doesn't give us a positive anthropology. The human race, east of Eden, entered corruption. Mind and body, heart and soul, are depraved, debauched, dissolute, dying.

Half a millennium ago, the Reformers argued for the marriage of priests partly on the basis of human nature. The Augsburg Confession first points out, "It is clear that in the Ancient Church priests were married men. For Paul says, 'An overseer must be the husband of one wife.'" Then it details the history that it wasn't until the 1200's that pastors had their wives violently taken from them. Then the final argument is based on man's nature: "Seeing that man's nature is gradually growing weaker as the world grows older, it is good to be on guard to make sure no more vices work their way into Germany" [AC XXIII.10-14]. If they only knew what was coming!

Each morning the world's events give evidence of rapid moral collapse. But if you know history, and Scripture, the descent into madness is not surprising. On Christmas morning, we heard the prologue of John's Gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not comprehend it." Now in today's Epistle, there is a similar theme: **"We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place."** The world is a dark place. The Lord knows the darkness that threatens to overwhelm you—cruel kids at school, loneliness and ostracism, lust, resentment, seething anger, pain in the limbs once so agile. All the money and alcohol and staring at videos until the eyes glaze over don't drive away the darkness, but it only settles in deeper. Staying up fretting resolves nothing other than to make the morning more difficult.

But you have, St. Peter says, "a lamp shining in a dark place." What is that lamp? It is, he tells us, **"the prophetic word more fully confirmed."** That seems obscure, but it really isn't. Peter has just told us that he and his fellow apostles were eyewitnesses of the transfiguration. **"We ourselves heard [the] voice [when] we were with [Jesus] on the holy mountain."** They heard what the Father's voice said about Jesus: **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to the transfiguration, but we are not. Wouldn't it be great to have what they had, to see what they saw, to hear what they heard? Now this is hard to grasp, but Peter says we have something more reliable, more certain. **"We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed."** He's talking about the Gospel writings, such as Matthew, that give for us the account of the transfiguration, along with the preaching of Jesus, the institution of Baptism and the Supper, and the reliable, eyewitness records of Jesus' death and resurrection and what they mean for us.

This is the question each of us has to answer: Are these Scriptures "cleverly devised myths"? The Apostles went to their deaths testifying, "No. We are

telling the truth." **"We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."**

Those eyewitness accounts—the Holy Scriptures—are your light in all your dark places. Now the Bible is a big book, containing many types of writings: history, poetry, prayers, doctrine, practical wisdom. A guidebook is helpful.

I have happy memories of visiting Rome with my wife Kassie for our 10th anniversary. One day we went to Palatine Hill; we didn't know what we were looking at, but the guidebook we had included a self-guided tour; we walked the outline of the ruins of the palace, looked down on the ancient circus, and learned to identify what we were seeing.

The *Catechism* is your guidebook to the Scriptures; it shows you the outlines, the big picture. Those first three chief parts—the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer—they give you the main teachings of the Bible and your path through the darkness of this world.

In the darkness of this world, there are many false gods, but the First Commandment gives us the gift of God Himself. The rest of the Commandments show us all of our false gods, and teaches us to repent. The Creed shows us that God made the world; it's no accident – *you're* no accident. It shows us the Jesus Christ is your Lord, who has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature; that He is risen from the dead; and to you is given the gift of the Holy Spirit. We learn to call upon God from the darkness, that He will be with us in temptation and deliver us from evil. And we learn how God is working on us in Baptism, Confession, and Supper. And we're fitted out with prayers to get us through the day.

This message from the Scriptures is your lamp in a dark place. It shows us Jesus, of whom the Father says, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." That spotlight on Jesus the Redeemer then shines on you.

Forgiven, justified, sanctified, because of Jesus the Father says the same words to you: "You are My beloved child; in you I am well pleased." So be of good cheer. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. +INJ+