

Week of March 5 – 11

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

A week later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the mountains with him. While he prayed, he was transformed as they looked on. His countenance changed. His clothes turned a stark glistening white, and he began to glow. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with him about his mission in Jerusalem. The disciples felt faint, and Peter, unaware of what he was doing, blurted, "I'm so glad we're here, Lord. We should erect three shelters."

While he spoke, a cloud formed and a voice bellowed, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." When the disciples heard it, they fell to the ground and hid their faces. With a reassuring touch, Jesus told them to get up. As they looked around, everything was normal. The cloud and the two men were gone, and Jesus was alone. As they descended the mountain, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen and heard until he rose from death. They had no idea he was talking about rising from death but agreed to keep it private.

As they walked, the disciples asked Jesus the meaning of the prophecy that Elijah would appear to introduce God's savior. "That's right. Elijah has to set things in order and validated the Christ," he explained. "Elijah has already come, but they mocked him and abused him and brutally murdered him. That's how they're going to treat me. Men would prefer to do away with me and be left to their own willful interests." They realized he was talking about John the Baptist.

Jesus Heals a Boy with an Unclean Spirit (Matthew 17: 14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43)

The next day, a large crowd met them. Some scribes from the Temple questioned a man who brought his only son along. When Jesus approached to find out what was going on, the man turned to him, pleading, "Lord, my son is acting crazy. Look at him. Everywhere we go, he screams and thrashes uncontrollably. He falls down and knocks things over, and then he just drools and sneers. He's bruised up like this all the time. He's withering away and can't even tell me what's wrong. I asked your disciples to help, but they couldn't do anything."

"People are way too preoccupied with their physical health and material well-being," Jesus replied. "How long do you think I'll be here with you? How long do you expect me to put up with your concern for physical and material health and comfort? Bring the child to me," The man brought his son to Jesus. No sooner had the boy made eye contact with Jesus than he began to convulse and fell to the ground, shaking and drooling. "How long has he been like this? Jesus asked. "Since he was an infant." His father replied. "He often falls and gets hurt. This illness is killing him. Oh, please, Lord, can you help us?"

"I can help anyone who believes I can," Jesus declared. "Oh, Lord, I believe you," the man cried out through his tears. "Please pardon my lack of faith."

As the crowd watched on, Jesus rebuked the evil spirit. "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you to leave this child alone!" he charged. The boy screamed and collapsed. The crowd was silent and began to mutter he was dead. Jesus took the boy by the hand, helped him to his feet, and handed the healthy boy back to his father, and everyone marveled at what God had done.

Once inside, his disciples asked why they couldn't do anything. "You lack confidence," Jesus told them. "A tiny bit of faith can overcome mountainous problems. There's nothing you can't do if

you believe. But you aren't ready to deal with serious problems until you have purged yourself and fully dedicated yourself to God."

Jesus Again Foretells His Death (Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

Leaving there, they passed through Galilee, trying not to draw attention. Jesus used the time to explain what was coming, telling his disciples that he would be turned over to men who would kill him, and he assured them that three days later, he would arise from the dead. They didn't understand, but no one dared to ask him about it.

The Temple Tax (Matthew 17:24-27)

When they arrived at Capernaum, the tax assessor stopped them and asked Peter if they paid the temple tax. Peter said they do pay it. Jesus paused and asked Peter, "Who ought to pay the tax, citizens of a place, or those who are passing through?"

When Peter said visitors and guests are supposed to pay, Jesus probed him further, asking, "Then do citizens have no obligation? So that we don't take advantage and offend anyone, put a line into the lake and catch a fish. When you open the mouth of the first one you catch, you'll find a coin. Take it to the agent and tell him it's for both of us."

Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom? (Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48)

As they sat around the house later that day, Jesus overheard the disciples bickering over who would be the most prominent among them. Setting a child on his lap, Jesus said, "If any man wants to be at the forefront, he must serve everyone else. To enter the spiritual realm, you must look at the world through the eyes of an innocent child. Whoever welcomes a little child welcomes me, and the one who sent me."

Warning against Causing Unbelievers to Sin (Matthew 18:6-14; Mark 9:38-50; Luke 9:49-50)

John said, "Master, we met a fellow who was invoking your name to cast out demons. When he wouldn't join up with us, we made him stop." Jesus replied, "Don't stop him. No one who does something good in my name performs a disservice to me. He won't hurt us if he's not our adversary. Anyone who offers to do something good for someone in my name will be rewarded. But anyone who takes advantage of an unsuspecting soul who lets his guard down because my name is dropped, would rather hang from a tree or drown in the sea than face my wrath."

"It's a cruel world, but woe to those who hurt others by their cruel deeds. You'd be better off entering the kingdom of Heaven maimed or debilitated than to be cast into the furnace of eternal torment with a healthy body. If you are inclined toward malicious greed, get rid of it. It's better to be naïve and enter the kingdom of life than be banished forever because of your manipulation of others. Everyone gets burned once in a while, but you also enjoy good fortune occasionally. Don't let disappointments ruin you. Try to get along with everyone the best you can, despising no one. God's angels keep constant surveillance over them, and I came to defend the oppressed."

"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, doesn't he leave his flock to find the lost one? And, when he finds it, he is more excited over that one sheep than the 99 that are secure. Your Heavenly Father desires a good relationship with every soul on Earth."

Forgiving a Sinning Brother (Matthew 18:15-35)

“If someone sins against you, go to him privately. If he acknowledges his sin, you may be able to restore your relationship, but if he refuses, confront him in the presence of one or two witnesses who are willing to hear both sides. If he doesn't accept their conclusion, take the matter to the church. Then, if he won't respond appropriately, you should stop associating with him.

Then Peter asked, “How many times do I have to forgive my brother and give him another chance? Until I am totally offended and his credibility is destroyed?” “Not just until you are totally offended, and he has lost credibility, Peter. Continue to forgive him well beyond that,” Jesus replied. “The spiritual domain is similar to a king who dealt with his citizens. One of his subjects piled up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars, and when he couldn't pay, the king ordered his belongings to be confiscated, and his family sold into slavery. The unfortunate subject fell to his knees, begging the king to give him time to repay his debt. Knowing he would never repay the debt, the king had compassion, forgave the debt, and set him free.

“That same man went out and found a friend who owed him a few hundred dollars. He grabbed him by the throat, demanding he pay at once. His friend fell to his knees and pleaded for more time to repay his debt. But the man wouldn't hear it and called the authorities to have the man arrested and jailed until he could repay.

“When the neighbors saw this, they reported it to the king. The king reprimanded him severely, reminding him that he had forgiven his debt and asked why he didn't show compassion to his friend. Then the king arrested him and sent him to the torture chamber until his entire debt could be repaid. That's exactly what you can expect from your Heavenly king if you refuse to forgive your brothers who sin against you.”

Start of His Journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-56; John 7:10)

When Jesus recognized it was now time for him to go to Jerusalem, he sent James and John ahead to find a place to stay. They went to a Samaritan village but weren't well-received because the Samaritans knew Jesus was headed for Jerusalem. The couple suggested Jesus rain down fire from the sky to destroy them like the prophet Elijah had done. But Jesus turned and rebuked them, saying, “That's not who we are. I didn't come to destroy people, but to save them.” And they traveled on.

Ridiculed by Jesus' Half-brothers (John 7:2-9)

As the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles drew close, his brothers teased him, saying, “Why don't you go to Jerusalem and show your disciples what you can do. A celebrity should try to bolster his fame and popularity. Go make a spectacle of yourself.” He was their half-brother, so they had a hard time believing he was the Son of God, resenting the attention he was getting from everyone.

“This isn't a good time,” Jesus politely responded. “You can go anytime. No one has anything against you, but I have irritated a lot of people by exposing what is evil. Go on to the Feast; I'm not ready, yet. The timing isn't good.” So, he stayed in Galilee for a while longer.

Mixed Reaction to Jesus' Teaching and Miracles (John 7:11-31)

Jesus left Galilee, taking a route not to attract anyone's attention. When he finally arrived in Jerusalem, the priests were looking for him, asking people if they had seen him. He was very controversial, and most people respected and admired him, but some thought he was a fake.

Nobody supported him openly because the religious leaders despised him, and no one wanted to offend them.

During the holiday celebration, Jesus went to the Temple to read scriptures and share his insights. When the priests heard him, they marveled he knew so much and spoke so eloquently never having been formally trained. "My doctrine is not original. It came from the one who sent me," he told them. "Anyone who follows God can tell if what I say aligns with God or if I am making it up. Those who profess their own doctrine seek to gain respect for themselves, but one that promotes the will of God is humble and honest. Moses dictated the law, and you refuse to observe it. So why do you want to kill the messenger?" "That's absurd," They scoffed. "Who is trying to kill you?"

Jesus said, "If you twist the law and circumcise a man on the Sabbath, why are you upset that I healed a man on the Sabbath? Look at it objectively."

The residents of Jerusalem knew the priests vowed to kill Jesus, but when none of them responded to Jesus, they wondered if the leaders finally recognized he was the Christ. Jesus seemed to them like a common man, and they knew where he came from, but they expected their Savior to be a mysterious figure from a far away place no one knew about.

Standing on the podium in the Temple, Jesus said, "You know who I am, and you know where I came from. The one who sent me is real, and there is much you don't understand. I know him. I was with him, and he sent me here to you." The priests wanted to seize him, but couldn't because he performed so many miracles. When they say he was winning the crowd over, they closed in on him.

Frustrated Attempt to Arrest Jesus (John 7:32-52)

"I'll only be here with you a little longer," Jesus said to the crowd. "In a short while, I must return to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you won't find me because you can't come where I'm going." "Where can he go that we can't find him?" the priests asked. "Do you think he'll go to the gentiles and teach them? What else could he mean?"

As the holiday ended, Jesus cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, come to me, and I'll give you a drink. Trust me, and you will experience a living stream welling up inside of you. He spoke of the Holy Spirit that was to come after his death and resurrection. Many concluded he was a great prophet. Others were sure he was Christ, but some couldn't get over the fact that he came from Galilee. Isn't Christ supposed to come from Bethlehem?" they argued. The crowd was divided over him.

The Temple authorities wanted to have him arrested, but no one dared touch him. When the Temple guards came back without him, the priests wondered why he hadn't been arrested. "No one ever spoke like him," they reported. "Were you mesmerized, too?" they asked. "Do you see the priests following after him? It seems those who aren't sophisticated in theology are all getting spellbound."

Nicodemus spoke up, "How can we judge a man before listening to him?" They told Nicodemus that no prophet could come out of Galilee. Eventually, they dismissed, and everyone went home.

Jesus Confirms His Divinity (John 8:1-59)

The next morning a man brought his wife to the priests to be judged, accusing her of adultery. They took her to Jesus to try to trap him. "What do you think we ought to do? The law says to

stone her," they asked. But Jesus ignored the question, bent over, and started writing in the dirt with his finger. "Sure. Find someone who hasn't sinned and let him throw the first stone." The men bowed their heads and walked away. Jesus stood up and asked, "Where are your accusers, ma'am? She confirmed no one was there to condemn her. Jesus said, "Nor do I. Go, but don't disregard the will of God again."

When the Pharisees said Jesus was saying things he couldn't back up, he assured them, "I know where I came from, and I know where I am going. You don't know anything about me. I have an open mind and understand and follow my Father's will. My views are validated by my Father. They asked him to bring his father to them to prove what he said. "You don't know my father or me. If you did, you would know who my father is and wouldn't continue to antagonize me. I'm going where you won't see me anymore," Jesus explained

They thought he intended to kill himself, but Jesus continued, "You are worldly oriented, and I am spiritually oriented. You don't believe who I am."

Who are you? "they gasped. "I am who I have claimed to be from the beginning. I have much to tell and explain to you. My father sent me and told me what to say," he said. But they couldn't understand so they agreed to listen. He said if they showed him respect, he would share what his father had revealed to him so they could be free. They argued they were Abraham's descendants and not slaves to anyone.

"If you're prone to sin, you're in bondage to your impulses. You won't be here forever, but I will live forever and can lead you to freedom. I know you are from Abraham, but you want to kill me because what I say doesn't line up with what you believe about me," Jesus added. But they insisted on maintaining Abraham's viewpoint.

"But you don't behave like Abraham. You want to kill me because I am revealing what God has said to me. Abraham wouldn't act like that. You're following your real father," Jesus rebuked. "We know our heritage. We are the children of God," they objected.

"Jesus rebuked them, saying, "If God were your father, you would embrace me because I am God's child. God sent me, and you can't understand me because you don't get it. You're the devil's children and do as he says. He's a deceiver who snatches life from man, always out for himself, offering deception. Can you show that I'm not aligned with God? They why not believe me?

The priest insisted he was a deranged person, but Jesus said, "I honor my father while you disrespect me. I don't need your honor. Someone else appreciates what I do." "You're a lunatic. Abraham died, and you're telling us that anyone who listens to you doesn't have to die. Are you better than Abraham and the prophets, who all died? Just who do you think you are?

"If I denied I know the father who gives me honor, I would be lying. I know him intimately and obey him. Abraham was pleased about my mission and was glad to see my coming.."

"You aren't even fifty years old yet. How could you know Abraham?" they asked. "I have existed since before Abraham," he replied. Then they started hurling stones at him, but he escaped.