

February 11, 2024  
Transfiguration Sunday

“Where Allegiance?”

Mark 9:2-9

Just to be perfectly clear: it is Transfiguration Sunday that is a high feast day in the Christian Church that commands the white paraments, not Super Bowl Sunday. There is, however, a football metaphor that might help us understand the Transfiguration a bit more clearly. You see, these past few weeks have been more than about the playoffs and Super Bowl in the NFL world. It has also been the season to fire and hire NFL head coaches.

This can be an awkward time for the players. More often than not I think the players are sad to see their coach leave. They were accustomed to him. They knew what to expect and generally liked him. They feel guilt that they didn't perform well enough for him that he could keep the job. And when the new coach arrives, they might resent some of the changes he makes and the different demands he places upon them. However, he is now the coach and if they are going to play for him, their allegiance must change.

Something similar takes place amid the divine glory manifested on that mountain top at the Transfiguration. Jesus, the Christ of God, is revealed in blazing white glory and beside Him stand Moses and Elijah. The voice of the Father booms forth: *“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”*

Let me ask you this: Prior to the incarnate Jesus arriving in the flesh, who was it that God's people were listening to? It was Moses and Elijah—the law and the prophets! What then is God the Father saying about this Christ in glory next to whom these two past leaders of Israel pale in comparison? Meet the new coach! Listen to Him! Hear Him!

With the coming of Christ all of God's people stand called to a new allegiance—a blessed allegiance to the Savior who has freed them from sin and opened the gates of heaven that we may follow our King of glory into His reign forever. Forgiveness of sins, salvation, forever life in the kingdom of God—you'd think this would be a no-brainer, right? Not quite.

When you read the New Testament and extra-biblical histories what is one of the main problems the early church faces? God's people won't give up the old coach! The Law and the prophets, the Torah, the Temple—the Jews will not subjugate these to the new voice of God's free grace in Christ Jesus. The Jews persecute the Christians. Jews within the fledgling church try to impose circumcision and other Jewish practices on the Gentile believers. They will not let the Gospel reign over the old way of thinking.

And I'm likely stretching the metaphor here, but what happens to the players who don't follow their coach? They're off the team. Jesus and the apostles are not at all unclear—those who reject the Christ in favor of the old ways are lost, rejected as God's people Israel.

And I'm going to dump the metaphor now because Christ has died and Christ is risen! There is no Super Bowl of salvation yet to be played. Jesus. Is. Lord. Only Jesus speaks forgiveness. Only Jesus speaks regeneration and redemption. Only Jesus saves.

The question we need to be continually posing to ourselves is, “Where does my allegiance lie?” I struggled over whether to make that word, allegiance, plural or singular in that question. My first thought was that Jesus is our highest allegiance, but we can't help but have other, lesser allegiances in the varied vocations, duties and relationships He gives us in this earthly life. I actually wrote that question as “Where do my allegiances lie” in the first draft of this sermon, thinking of Christ as our highest allegiance. But as I tried to move on, that totally fell apart. Jesus Himself destroys that in Luke's Gospel saying, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and*

*children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*” Scripture doesn’t leave any wiggle room at all. You shall have no other gods.

Sorry, bringing back the metaphor—a coach calls the plays and the players play the plays at the direction of the coach. You can think of this life and all those people around you in it, all those duties and responsibilities, all those vocations and relationships, it’s all on the playing field to be performed at the direction and to the glory of that one guy, Christ, to whom you owe all allegiance—to whom you owe everything because He is the one who saves you from eternal death.

So back to the question, “Where does my allegiance lie?” Just pause for a moment and mentally answer that question in your head; “Where does my allegiance lie?” (Pause)

You’re in church so I hope you answered “Jesus”. But each of us knows that out in life the answer much too often is “Myself”. It is. You know how many Christians have said to me, “I have a right to be happy”? No you don’t. If Christ’s design for you is suffering service to His glory with little worldly happiness for yourself, is He then wrong, underserving of your allegiance? No! He is the Savior who has redeemed you for eternity! He is that guy standing in divine glory on the mountaintop and He deserves your fidelity because He is the great I AM and nothing less! Yet, when our worldly desire comes into conflict with His divine will, how quickly do we switch allegiances?

Here is one glaring example in our culture—weddings! A man and woman fall in love and they can’t keep themselves from doing the “one flesh” thing. Fine. God created that and He has a good design for that—His institution of marriage in which He wants man and woman to find delight in one another.

So, submit to God’s will and get married? No! Somehow it suddenly becomes acceptable for the allegiance to swing from Christ’s design to “my perfect wedding day!” So let’s shack up, live together, sleep with each other and maybe even have a few of those one-flesh products with stinky diapers because, well, we have to save up enough for an insanely expensive party so we can end up with a bunch of pictures we rarely look at. My allegiance is to me.

I picked weddings because that such a clear-cut example of how Christians almost systematically do this, but it’s a daily thing with us. We will forego love of neighbor because of an allegiance to a political point of view that distains certain groups. We shirk firstfruits giving because of an allegiance to a required standard of living we MUST maintain. This week some toss self control to the wind in allegiance to the spirit of Mardi Gras. We will skip out on the Divine Service because of an allegiance to Saturday night partying...or golf...or gambling...or maybe just the warm of a comfy bed. Whatever. It is an allegiance to something other than Christ...and that is sin, maybe even a sin bordering on unbelief and where that leads.

This transfiguration of Jesus makes obvious how insanely idiotic it is to have any other allegiance in this world. The Father is not unclear: *“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”* His appearance is not unclear—Jesus is the divine Son of God whose glory is shared with no other authority. At no other point in Christ’s ministry is it made clearer that His people must render Him all allegiance in joyful submission to their Savior, except, of course, at the cross of Calvary. This is perhaps why Jesus told James, Peter and John to say nothing of what they had seen until He had risen from the dead.

The transfiguration is Christ’s power revealed in a glory by which men are reduced to babbling in terror of His might. And yes, that is reason enough to render Him the full allegiance He is due. The cross is the glory of Christ’s sacrificial love for you, His people. This is the way He truly desires you know Him, by grace through the Gospel.

So render full allegiance to Jesus in all of you and everything of your life, not because He is the God all power, authority and might, although that is most certainly true. Surrender all allegiance to Him because of His allegiance to you, that you would be saved as His forever.

Amen.