

The team comes into the locker room. It's the last big game. The other team has been near unstoppable, and a lot of the team is nervous about playing them. It's gonna be hard but you know that they can win. You know that if they can get their mind off the fears and remember what they've learned and how hard they've worked, that they can dig right deep down and pull out that victory when it counts. You know it, but you've gotta make them believe it. So, what do you say?

The movies always make it look so easy, but they've got a team of script writers with a lot of time to think up the perfect words. It's not so easy when you've gotta come up with the pep talk. And what about when the stakes are higher than just losing the big game? What about when it's crunch time at work and failure means the loss of a lot of money? What do you say to people to keep them from getting discouraged? What about when a loved one is going through the valley? What do you say to help them soldier on?

Or consider this: what do you say to help your bumbling disciples hold together through your own arrest, torture, crucifixion, death, and finally resurrection? How do you prepare your church for literally an entire world against them? What do you say to the people you have died for so they soldier on through the suffering, the discouragement, and death?

Today, God prepares us for what is to come, but not with a well-scripted Pre-Game Pep Talk. Today God prepares us for Lent and for life, with a Pre-Lent Pep Walk. Join me as we walk with Jesus and his disciples up the mountain. There God prepares us for our lives of suffering and repentance so that we might endure to the last and finally gain the prize that Christ was won for us.

In St. Mark's gospel, we've seen Jesus reveal his glory to those he has called. We've seen him do incredible things, healing diseases, casting out demons! His popularity is skyrocketing! People can't get enough of Jesus!

But by the time we get to Mark chapter 9, however, we find out that it's not all just rainbows and butterflies. Jesus isn't here to cure all diseases and end world hunger. Those things will come in heaven, but Jesus isn't here to just give us

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everything we want right now. No, instead, Jesus has started to talk about his mission. He's here to suffer. He's here to die. That's not nearly as exciting.

But before the harsh reality of Jesus' mission sets in on his disciples, he shows the who it is who is suffering. On the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word for that sounds like metamorphosis: a complete change! Like when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly! Jesus became so bright, even his clothes shined. This was the dazzling glory of God shining through the humble human skin and clothing!

Jesus wanted his disciples *and us* to remember that he is not just another guy suffering. The world has plenty of those. This is God himself who is about to endure the shame, the sorrow, the suffering. This is God about to die in our place.

As Peter, James, and John are trying to wrap their heads around what is going on, suddenly Moses and Elijah are there, talking with Jesus! Here they are!

Moses, the great giver of the law! The man through whom God revealed his will for our lives and brought order to this chaotic world of sin.

Elijah, the great preacher of repentance! The man who came to those who break God's laws and demanded their 180 degree turn-around or else they would be destroyed!

And Jesus, the great Son of God! The man who pleased God and gave himself to death to provide salvation for all those repentant breakers of God's law.

And then in the midst of that monumental meeting, as the disciples are shading their eyes from the brilliant shine of Jesus' godliness, this glorious cloud appears and engulfs them and resonates with the voice of God the Father, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

This shining figure, this Jesus is God's Son. This Jesus is the One whom God loves. And we think, "Yeah, whatever, God loves the world." No! God loves Jesus. God's love is only directed in one direction. It is aimed at Jesus, but that love flows through Jesus to the rest of the world. Outside of Jesus, we remain God's enemies and we remain in God's hatred, but through Christ, the one God loves, God loves

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the world! Jesus is someone worth listening to.

And just as suddenly as it started, it's all gone. The glory, the prophets, the cloud, the voice, it's all gone, except for Jesus, humble, lonely Jesus. As they go down the mountain, after hearing the command of God to listen to Jesus, what's the first thing they hear? The Son of man is going to rise from the dead. This is what Jesus wants to talk about. This is what God wants us to listen to.

This man Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, the one God loves, the one through whom God loves the world... This man Jesus Christ, who is the God of Moses who gave the law on Mount Sinai, and also the God of Elijah who sent down fire from heaven to burn his soaked altar and prove that he is the one true God and thereby bring judgment on the unrepentant... This man Jesus Christ is God all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-glorious, and he went to the cross to suffer, to die, and to be buried. He went to the ground to rise from the dead.

This is our God's Pre-Lent Pep Walk for his people. This is what God wanted to show his disciples before they saw Jesus arrested and tortured, before they saw Jesus condemned to death, before they themselves abandoned Jesus, before Peter in fear denied that he even knew Jesus. God wanted his disciples equipped with the courage of knowing that Jesus was going to that cross for a reason, for their very salvation, and for ours. Jesus' death was the darkest moment in their lives, but Jesus equipped them to soldier through it and reach the other side when Jesus rose again.

God wants to show us the Transfiguration before we recognize that we live in an entire world that is against us, before we see just how much the world will hate us, before we feel the sting of how greatly the world will wrong us. In those moments, God does not want us to become terrified or embittered.

Instead God shows us the transfiguration so that we might recognize that the world hated our God first, but he overcame the world. The world wronged Jesus first, but what of it? He let them do it. He did what was right despite all the wrong and sin around him and so he won our salvation.

The world will hate us, but we overcome the world through faith in Jesus. The world will wrong us, but what of it? Let them do what they will. We will follow Jesus. We will cling to faith and righteousness in Christ despite all the wrong and

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sin around us.

The God who died for us wants us to see his Transfiguration before we endure more suffering, before we face another discouragement, before we see another death. When we get to those dark and painful moments that are all too common in life, Jesus wants us to remember those glowing hands and feet were pierced with nails. Jesus wants us to remember that head crowned with dazzling light was also crowned with thorns. Our God wants us to see that he endured the suffering, he faced the discouragement, he died the death. Christ walked the path of suffering. And we walk that glorious and sacred path too.

So let the suffering come. We will endure because Christ did. And he has promised to turn it into our growth and blessing. If God almighty was willing to suffer for us, what pain would he possibly allow into our lives unless it were for our ultimate good?

Let the discouragement come. We will cling even more tightly to Christ in faith. He has promised to be our strength in weakness. If God all-glorious was willing to be shamed for us, what discouragement would he allow into our lives unless it served the greater purpose of strengthening our faith in him?

Let even death come. We will rise again. He has promised that since he lives, we also will live. If the God of life was willing to die so that we might escape eternal death, then we are certain that we will rise to be with him forever. Amen.