

I used to enjoy watching Sesame Street with my kids. [Too bad they grew up!] One of the parts of the show I liked best was when they talked about a particular letter of the alphabet.

I think that has influenced the way I approached today's message. We are going to have a lot of words that begin with one letter: the letter T.

■ *The First T-word: Transfiguration.*

Every year as we prepare to leave the Season of Epiphany and enter into the Season of Lent we take a look at the Transfiguration. You probably know the story well. But as a review...

Jesus takes Peter, Paul and Mary up on a mountain to pray... OK, that was a test to see if you were listening. Jesus did not take Peter, Paul, and Mary. He took Peter, James and John.

Why did Jesus take those three with him? Well, why did you come to worship this morning with the people in your car? Why are you sitting next to the people you are sitting by at this service? And, if you had your choice, would you move away from them? Probably not!

Jesus was going to the top of the mountain to pray and worship. He brought Peter, James, and John with to share the experience with him. In the same way you came with certain family and you sit with particular friends to share this worship moment. Worship is not a solitary experience. It is a shared eternal moment. And I personally love sharing this time with all of you.

Jesus wants to share some things with us every time we come to pray and listen and grow. I hope that every Sunday when you leave this place you say in your heart, "Wow! It was like a Transfiguration moment! I saw the real Jesus!"

Worship like today always begins with a Transfiguration: followers following Jesus up a mountain to pray and worship.

- *That leads us to the Second T-word: Temptation.*

In order to see what brought Jesus to the Mountain we have to backtrack to where the journey began. The journey began in the wilderness where Jesus spent 40 days being tempted by the Devil.

Have you been tempted this week? Are you clear on what I am asking? Think about these other words and phrases for temptation: have you been lured, enticed, attracted to the wrong things, desired inappropriate things, been coaxed down the wrong path.

Have you been tempted this week? Has seen been a part of your life? Temptation never takes a day off.

Temptation is the world's oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. We all have our weaknesses: temper, eating, spending, drinking, whatever.

Page after page in the Bible is about temptations and the ways people give in:

- Abraham? He told people his beautiful wife was his sister so other kings would not kill him for his wife.
 - Samson? Big time problems with anger management – or the lack thereof.
 - David? You know the Bathsheba story, and the murder that followed the affair.
 - Elijah? Couldn't handle it anymore so he ran away.
 - The whole nation of Israel? Idol worship and materialism.
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The Bible lays out temptations and failures on page after page after page. It is a pretty messy and sordid picture, until we finally turn that page in the Bible and find one who does not fall to temptation.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into temptation. Every Sunday we pray, “*And lead us not into temptation...*” But the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

Jesus resisted every temptation the Devil threw at him. And here is how Jesus conquered every temptation. Look at this verse on the screen: *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* [Psalm 119:11]

How do you hide the Word of God in your heart to be used in times of need? Here are three suggestions:

- Memorize some favorite Bible verses. Like this one: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”* [Jeremiah 29:11] To find a Bible verse a day go to our website – pontonline.org – and click on Resources and Daily Bible Verse.
- Verbalize those Bible verses during the day. Let the verse flow from your mouth a few times.
- Internalize the Bible verse. Think about what the verse means between bites at Subway, or while waiting for the light to turn.

On Sunday mornings, after we climb the mountain to be with Jesus, we visit Temptation and Sin. We give thanks that Jesus remains sinless, and covers up our sins by grace.

Unlike Jesus, we will continue to have our failures. But Jesus gives us a model to resist temptation: Hide God’s Word in your heart. We can never be sinless, but we can sin less. Then...

- *The Third T-word: Teaching.* Which is the next part in our worship services.

At its heart, the teaching of Jesus is showing us places and people he has seen, but we have not yet seen.

When I close my eyes I can see places where I have been. I close my eyes and I can see a farm 7 miles from Rushford, MN. I see the farmhouse and the windmill and the sandpile and the chicken coop and the barn.

I close my eyes again and I can see the sign on the bluff. We used to climb up there and sit on the sit on the letter “H.” I close my eyes and I can picture places where I have been – so can you.

The Bible says: *“No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son is himself God and is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.”* [John 1:18] This means that Jesus could close his eyes and see God exactly as he is. Then Jesus could open his eyes and look at his disciples and say, “This is what God is like.”

Jesus could close his eyes and see the Kingdom of Heaven. Then he could open his eyes and look at the people and say, “The kingdom of heaven is like...”

That is what Jesus taught. He did not teach theory. He taught reality: the reality of God and his Kingdom.

You and I need to hear this teaching of Jesus in order to sustain and encourage our daily lives. We need this Teacher and this Teaching.

A children’s hospital had teachers come in and work with the young patients who faced long hospitalizations. One teacher walked into the room of a boy who had been severely burned.

The hospital teacher began by saying to the boy, “Today we will be studying nouns and adverbs.”

The next morning as the teacher arrived, a nurse said to her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize.

"No!" the nurse said. "We have been worried about that little boy; it was almost like he was giving up. But ever since yesterday his whole attitude has changed. It is as though he’s decided to live."

Later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. The little boy said, "They wouldn’t send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

The Father would not send us a Teacher to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven if we were dying. We sin and we fail God regularly, but we are not dying. We are not beyond hope. We are being prepared for eternal life. That is the essence of the teaching of Jesus. And that leads us to...

■ *The Fourth T-word: Tomorrow.*

Take a look at this Bible verse: “Then Joshua told the people, ‘Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do great wonders among you.’” [Joshua 3:5] Circle the word, “Tomorrow.”

What do you think tomorrow will be like? I hope you know that your tomorrow is in God’s hands. But sometimes people do not know that, or do not believe deep down in their spirits that God holds our tomorrows..

Mapmakers used to have a phrase they would write on unexplored parts of the world. When the known world came to an end and the unknown world began the mapmakers would write, “Here be the dragons.”

Sometimes our tomorrows look like they are full of dragons.

- Will my job get better or worse?
 - Will this pain get better or worse?
 - Will this relationship get better or worse?
 - Will my schedule get better or worse?
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Here be the dragons. The unknown dragons of tomorrow can overwhelm our today’s.

Jesus knew that the unknown dragons of Holy Week would tear his friends – his disciples – apart. So the Father gave them a very precious gift. He gave them a picture of tomorrow – Jesus standing on the Mountain in his glory.

You have a Tomorrow. The One who conquers all Temptations and who Teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven is preparing your Tomorrow. Amen.