

The Best Is Yet to Come

“And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts ...” 1 Peter 1:19.

The best is yet to come. In everyday life, this phrase suggests that while a glimpse of something positive, something good, has been seen, something even better is coming. These words promise hope. These words indicate a future brighter than the present. These words lead forward from the darkness of disappointment to the brilliance of satisfaction. And yes, this is my honest prayer – and it might yours too – for this message this weekend that the best is yet to come. Lord willing, we’ll get there.

So, this weekend’s sermon aside, have you had recent moments in your life where you’ve thought, the best is yet to come? Or has it been awhile? When the calendar year turns, we often believe this. Yet, just a month and a half into 2023 that belief may have quickly vanished. Like with starting the new year, when we start a new school grade or a new job, we cling in hope to the idea that the best is yet to come. Only to find too often that our hope was too good to be true. It even happens with our health and with our relationships, things begin positive but as the days and years wear on it gets harder and harder to think that the best is yet to come. Maybe now, you’re really starting to feel the same way about this sermon, but just hang in there, Lord willing, we’ll get there.

If our daily experiences in this world likely increase our doubt that the best is yet to come how long before this same doubt infects our faith? Or has it already? Has the Church’s responses to today’s cultural challenges left you doubting that the best is yet to come? Have the actions of other Christians made you believe that the best isn’t yet to come? Has the increasing danger of suffering for the faith convinced you that there isn’t any hope that the best is yet to come? Perhaps, it’s just time to give into the growing trend that Christianity’s best has already come and gone.

Yet before we completely throw in the towel and give up on this notion that the best is yet to come, let’s consider this Transfiguration reading in front of us this weekend. The events of this reading maybe a little bit familiar to us. Every year at this time, we hear one of the Gospels’ accounts of this important event. And what helps us see the importance of this Transfiguration event are the details that surround this event in our text. The first and last verses of the Gospel reading point us toward those surrounding details.

At the beginning of this reading, we heard a time reference, “**after six days.**” It’s a brief statement and one that could be easily overlooked. However, six days prior Peter had made a significant confession of faith. He, by God’s grace, had correctly identified Jesus as “**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” (*Matthew 16:16*). And upon Peter’s confession, Jesus promised to build His church and not even hell itself would prevail against His church. But then Jesus revealed the next steps for building His church, it involved suffering, death and resurrection and most shockingly, it involved His death at the hands of the current church leaders. Hearing this revelation, Peter, the one who had just faithfully identified Jesus, attempted to talk Jesus out of this plan. Jesus’ plan didn’t make sense to Peter – the living God shouldn’t have to die.

It’s these preceding details that give some greater insight to the events of our Transfiguration reading. After Jesus’ appearance changes and Moses and Elijah appear, Peter offers to lengthen this magnificent moment by making tents for everyone to stay around and hang out. For Peter, James and John, the best wasn’t yet to come, no, the best seemed to be right there in front of them in that moment. But the Father’s voice quickly showed that the best wasn’t completely right there in front of them. As the disciples cowered in fear, the vision vanished and only Jesus was left to raise them up from their fear. Then as they headed down the mountain, Jesus commands these disciples to secrecy until His resurrection.

Jesus’ command of secrecy in that final verse of our reading is also revealing for this Transfiguration event. For as amazing and inspiring as this moment must have been for Peter, James and John it wasn’t the best it could be, not yet. Their sin still cut them off from God’s completely revealed presence. Their sin riddled lives shook in fear at the voice of the Almighty. Remaining in that moment, meant that the disciples

would remain in their sin, Jesus still needed to suffer, die and rise so that they could truly know that the best was yet to come.

Like Peter, we too have latched onto moments and experiences when we thought the best was right there in front of us. We do grow shortsighted and seek to exchange what Jesus has won and promised to us for temporal, fleeting pleasures that seem more fulfilling in the present. We want to talk Him out of His plan for us especially when it involves suffering. "Far be it from us, Lord, that this and that should never happen to us! Why don't you just let us remain in the comforts we already had. There is no need for us to live under our crosses any longer!" Quickly, our relationship with Jesus sours as we doubt and deny that He can really deliver the best that is yet to come and instead we try to create our own personal best life in the present without Him.

Whether we've exchanged forgiveness for resentment and grudges, or Godly respect for hate and bullying, or contentment for envy and greed, or God's gift of marriage for lust and promiscuity, or life's God-given worth for apathy and death, or faithful suffering for worldly comfort and selfishness, we're all guilty of exchanging the best that is yet to come for the best we can find here and now. We'd prefer it if God would listen to us and not the other way around because we're convinced that we know what's best for us at any given moment.

Thankfully, God doesn't listen to our plea that we know best. If we're truly going to have the best that is yet to come, His plan is the only one that delivers it. Yes, we can certainly follow our own path and after a while He's not going to stop us, but it'll never be the best for us, the best that is yet to come. Only Jesus has that for us. Only Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection for our sake gives us real hope in knowing that the best is yet to come no matter the current challenges in our lives. Only Jesus picks us up and removes our fear when we recognize the depth of our sinfulness. Only Jesus lifts our eyes up from the darkness of our sin to His light of life and hope. Only Jesus delivers the best that is yet to come.

Peter affirms this truth for us in our second reading this weekend. Writing years later after Jesus' Transfiguration, death, resurrection and ascension, he shares his takeaway from all that he had witness with his own eyes. He wasn't worried for his hearers that the best of faith was behind them because they hadn't seen Jesus' Transfiguration. Instead, he encouraged them because they had God's more sure Word pointing them to Jesus – the light in the midst of this world's darkness – and guiding them in anticipation for His second coming. We, too have this sure and certain Word of God pointing us to Jesus our light in this present darkness and our anchor until He returns again.

It is this sure and certain Word that the Holy Spirit delivers to us again and again so that we might be reminded of our hope in this life, that in Jesus the best is yet to come. Together, we wait for Jesus' return, knowing that we are forgiven by His sure and certain Word. This truth is made concrete for us in the waters of baptism and His body and blood of communion. The Holy Spirit uses these gifts of Jesus' sure and certain Word to comfort and strengthen us. To assure us that our hope is real and certain right now and will only grow brighter as we draw one day closer to Jesus' return.

Yes, in Jesus, the best is yet to come. We have a taste of this right now and we look forward to the fullness to come. Yes, even in our pain and suffering, even in our trials and tribulations, even in our brokenness self-inflicted and received, Jesus, only Jesus, delivers hope that the best is yet to come. And as we prepare to enter into this Lenten season and see our sinfulness sharply exposed know that your Savior walks with you. The One who carried your sin and died for you. The One who rose so that you might not endure your burdens alone. The One whose words and presence serve as a light and constant reminder in this world of darkness that the best is yet to come. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan