

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LOGANVILLE, GA
FEBRUARY 11, 2024

**JESUS DISPELLS
THE DARK CLOUD OF UNCERTAINTY
(2 Peter 1:16-19)**

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Over the past 20 years or so there seems to be a dark cloud that is hovering over our nation – a deep uncertainty that keeps us on edge about how things are going to turn out. Perhaps especially as we approach the presidential election in November we might sense that uncertainty more and more. Who's going to be elected? Will the other side riot and cause turmoil? Will our nation survive? Will democracy survive? These are the kinds of questions that are being asked more and more, and these questions are intended to keep us on edge – to keep us in a state of uncertainty.

How do you deal with uncertainty in your life? People have all kinds of approaches to uncertainty – ignore it, embrace it, pretend it's not there, but none of those approaches actually take away uncertainty. There is only one solution to life's uncertainty. It's mentioned toward the end of the Bible in the section we refer to as 2 Peter 1:16-19:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (17) For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This

is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," (18) we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (19) And we have something more certain, the prophetic word, to which you 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.

Uncertainty – that shadow that looms over our lives – is not a novel experience confined to our time. It is a timeless companion, hovering over every generation. Many of the issues which are the cause for uncertainty in our lives are actually common to all people of all times. We tend to think that we, in this moment of history in this little corner of the world, are the only ones with this cloud hanging over us, but if we would look just a block down the road or back only 10 years ago, we can see that uncertainty exists there and existed then, too. For some reason, that cloud of uncertainty just seems darker over us right now. We don't see how other people are just as troubled, just as uncertain about the future, but they are. Uncertainty is common in every place and every generation because fear and doubt are common to everyone.

What is the actual source of this uncertainty? The answer of atheists and humanistic biologists to that question is that it's all just random accidents and that you just have to learn to accept this uncertainty as a part of being nothing more than a part of the randomness of the universe – for that's all you are and all you will ever be until you cease to be. What a sad outlook! That answer does nothing to help you in the midst of all of the uncertainties of life. And it just leaves you in your uncertainty.

The Bible has a better answer, but more importantly, it also has an actual solution to your uncertainty. Uncertainty is the result of a corrupted existence resulting from a broken relationship with our Creator. Uncertainty abounds ever since the first two human beings – Adam and Eve – decided to rebel against the Creator. We call that event the Fall into sin. From that point on uncertainty has been a real problem. Read through the Old Testament of the Bible and you will find one generation after another struggling with all of the problems that we have to contend with that leads to all the uncertainty we experience. There were family conflicts, natural disasters, health issues, political upheavals, greed, covetousness, adultery, stealing, and rebellion. All of these things brought on uncertainty from generation to generation.

Four thousand years into the Bible, Jesus' own disciples experienced that uncertainty, too. They lived in a nation had been overrun by their political and religious enemies, the Roman Empire. Their economy limped along like ours does. And they, too, experienced uncertainties closer to home. One particular uncertainty they experienced was in connection with their relationship with Jesus. They had placed all their eggs in one basket, so to speak, with Jesus. They believed Him to be the promised Messiah, the One who would come and restore Israel to prominence in the world. They witnessed Jesus do amazing things – heal the sick, feed the hungry, even raise the dead, and they heard Him say some rather astounding things about the invisible Kingdom of God and how things were so different in it than the way things are in the world. But then His private lessons with them turned to discussions about Him being arrested by those who had political authority and about His own

death. This kind of talk didn't assuage their uncertainty; in fact it exacerbated it.

Then everything happened just as Jesus said it would. He was betrayed by one of His disciples, arrested by a mob sent from the ruling party of the Jews, handed over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and nailed to a cross like a hardened criminal. At that point, that cloud of uncertainty had enveloped Jesus' disciples so much that they went into hiding because they were concerned that the same thing might happen to them.

When you think about it, though, wouldn't you do the same? Wouldn't the uncertainty of life grip your heart with fear? You'd like to answer "No," but how many nights do you lie awake for far less threatening and stressful issues that plague your mind and heart? You aren't nearly as immune to the struggles of life and the fears associated to human existence as you pretend to be. Bills are coming due. Medical appointments are on the horizon. Family issues are not yet resolved. Throw on top of it all how things are in the political realm and on the world stage. Oh, there's definitely a dark cloud hanging over us all.

Well, years after Jesus crucifixion, Peter, recalling the uncertainty of those days, reflected on another event that preceded Jesus' death. It was that event that made him realize that there really never was any uncertainty. That event that Peter remembered was the day he and two of his friends – James and John – were with Jesus on a mountain. He recalled how Jesus was transfigured – changed in appearance, shining brighter than the sun – and realized that what he saw that day was nothing other than the eternal God who had created the universe and the world. Here God

was, with an assumed human nature, not taking uncertain steps into an uncertain future, but deliberately traveling to the cross to provide the world with certainty for the future. Though Peter suggested that they remain on that mountain, Jesus knew that He had an appointment on another mountain, one named Golgotha – the place of a skull. It would be on that mountain that He would provide the world with certainty. When He was nailed to and died on a cross on that mountain, He died to take away all sin and to set us – our very nature and existence – right again as God intended it to be when He made us. Peter, James, and John saw the perfect holiness of God shine forth from Jesus mortal body on one mountain, but then they also saw His love and mercy shine forth as Jesus intentionally and definitively give His human body as the sacrifice to take away sin.

That’s all well and good for Peter and James and John, but what about the rest of us. We didn’t get to see Jesus shining in His unmasked glory. We weren’t there on that mountain. Nor did we get to see Jesus take away our sin. How can we proceed into the future with certainty when so much of the world and of our own lives seems to be so uncertain? We experience our own weaknesses both in body and in spirit. We don’t know how long we have to live and in what way we will die. Why don’t we get to see what those three disciples saw – if they really did see it – to carry us through these uncertain times?

To think that way is to misunderstand Peter’s point. You see, Peter recognized that while it was a great blessing to witness Jesus’ transfiguration, there is something even more certain than that. He says, “*we have something more certain, the prophetic word, to which you 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.” Yes, more sure than seeing Jesus’ glory for a few minutes is the prophetic Word, the Bible. That is our source of certainty. That is the bright light that shines in the midst of the darkness of uncertainty that has enveloped our lives.

Peter’s talking about how Jesus fulfilled all the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament, and he’s talking about how the vision of the glorified Jesus together with the vision of the crucified Jesus points ahead to that life that God intended us to have with Him.

You see, our uncertainties, as well as the fear that accompanies them, is really all about death. We sense uncertainty because we tend to be focused on the possibility of death. Well, because of our sin death is a possibility. Actually, death is a reality, because the wages of sin is death, the Bible tells us. We have all inherited a sinful nature from our parents and we can trace that back to Adam and Eve. That’s why uncertainty is not limited to any era or any place or any person. Yet, the point of the Bible is not to tell us that death is a reality. That we can see for ourselves. The point of the Bible is to show us the only remedy for death is not found in our worries and our fears. The remedy for the uncertainty is Jesus.

The Bible directs us to Jesus. In the Bible we hear about how God was “well pleased” with Jesus because He lived the perfect life that we could not, His perfect life given on the cross in place of our sinful life. We hear about Jesus’ death which He died to make atonement for our sins. We hear about His resurrection, which proves that the sacrifice for sins was complete and that we too will rise again. We

hear these things about Jesus, through the Word, and by that Word heaven is open to us. God will not punish me as I have deserved because of my sin. Jesus has taken away my sin. Jesus has earned eternal life for me.

Now, as you hear these things, something amazing is happening. This message of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross causes the morning star to rise in your hearts. Do you know what that's talking about? It's talking about the promise of heaven. It's talking about the hope of a life free from uncertainty, since that which brings so much uncertainty is gone.

In this way, the God's Word, the Bible, is a lamp that makes a light of of certain salvation shine in our hearts. Because of the ways things are in this life, we're tempted constantly to doubt this salvation and to be afraid of the future. It's a real struggle to keep out the world's dark ideas about God. The world tempts us to think that the message of the Bible is nothing more than a cleverly invented story, that Jesus is a fable. But, when this life is over, then we will see that it was the uncertainties of the world that were fiction. All the pleasures of this world are the real cleverly invented stories. When heaven comes, then the day will truly dawn. We won't need the lamp of the Bible anymore, because we'll be able to look around and see the truth of God's salvation.

That life is certain for a couple of reasons. First of all, only the Bible actually explains to us why things are the way they are – why we have so many struggles and why death is not just a possibility but a reality for each of us. Secondly, the Bible gives us the only remedy to the uncertainty that comes with living in this world with the reality of death –

that remedy being the promise of life through Jesus. We do well to pay attention to the Bible, not just to be reminded of what great things God has in store for us, but also because through that Word He is delivering to us those great things. Through His Word He is shining the light of certainty into our hearts and dispelling the darkness of uncertainty brought on by our sins. Here is the certainty: your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake, death is defeated through Jesus' resurrection, and eternal life is yours through faith in Him.