

My friends in Christ, in the northern part of the Holy Land, in Galilee, there is a long valley that spans east-west from the Israel-Jordan border in the east to the Mediterranean in the west; and it is surprisingly green, with a river running through it. This valley in the Holy Land is much longer and fairly wider; otherwise, it is remarkably like Chewelah, or Peone Prairie where I grew up.

And this valley in the Holy Land is called the Jezreel Valley. It is also known as the Kishon Valley because the river that runs through it is the Kishon River.

Now, in the field of archaeology, there is something called a “tel.” A tel is a mound of dirt, where once upon a time there was a city, and that city was deserted or destroyed, and time goes by, and someone comes along and buries the remains of that city to build a new city, and *that* city ends up deserted or destroyed, and time goes by, and somebody *else* comes along and buries the remains of *that* city to build a new city, and so on. A tel, then, is an archaeological site that uncovers layers upon layers of ancient city upon ancient city.

Now, I mention that because the Jezreel Valley is home to the largest and most fascinating tel in the Holy Land and therefore perhaps the entire world. It is a tel called Megiddo.

The word “tel” is, I suspect, a Greek word. The Hebrew word for “tel” is *'ar* – A-R with a hard A, meaning that the word begins with that H-sound. Another Hebrew word like this is *'adam*, which we find in the Book of Genesis; *'adam* means “man” in the generic sense, like “human.” It is where we get the name “Adam.” Okay, so...we have the tel called Megiddo...Tel Megiddo...or *'ar* Megiddo...or Armageddon. Yes, in that valley, in that place, is where Scripture prophesies the final battle between good and evil will take place at the end of the world. Revelation sixteen: there is the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, and demons came forth from them.

These were demonic spirits who performed signs. They went out to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty.... They then assembled the kings in the place that is named Armageddon in Hebrew. [Then] the seventh angel poured his bowl into the air. [And] a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.”

I was there in that valley; I was there where the world will end.... So what in the world does this have to do with the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, which is the centerpiece of our Gospel text today? The “high mountain” which the Lord had chosen as the site of His Transfiguration that He might manifest His glory to His apostles.... It is a mountain called Mount Tabor. There are lots of

mountains mentioned in Scripture, many of them located in the Holy Land. But almost all of them are hardly more than a somewhat distinctive feature of an otherwise indistinct mountain ridge. And many of these “mountains” in Sacred Scripture are not *really* mountains.... But Mount Tabor in fact *is* a real mountain. It stands alone. It rises nineteen hundred feet above sea level – which, given the fact that much of Galilee is actually *below* sea level, definitely makes Mount Tabor stand out! So it is a *true* mountain, the highest peak in Galilee...*and* it overlooks the Jezreel Valley where Tel Megiddo resides...where Armageddon will happen at the end of days.

What is the Transfiguration? The Transfiguration is Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, in manifesting the fullness of His risen and eternal glory even *before* He suffers, dies, and rises again. It is a glimpse of His majesty, a preview of coming attractions as it were. When Christ comes again at the end of days, He will appear to us as He appeared to Saint Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday at the empty tomb...how He appeared to Saints Peter, James, and John that fateful night atop Mount Tabor...how He will appear to *everyone* who freely choose to remain in their sins, in the defiance of God, in their sad attachment to vice and to the things of Earth. Jesus appeared on that mountain, which overlooks the site of Armageddon, as if to oversee the site of His future victory, to show all of history and all the world that though the final battle of good and evil is still yet to be fought, *He* has already won! The good has already triumphed over evil; the battle is already over before it has even begun.

And yet...evil is still going to try to win, futile though it is. And evil will even look like it is winning even now. Indeed, to many of us in many ways, it seems evil has won already (just look at the failings of our own American culture!), and we are left to twist in the wind and suffer the decay of what once had been beautiful and good and true. So *does* evil get to have the last laugh? Should we just give it all up? Abandon all hope, abandon ourselves to temptation and sin, live and let live, whatever feels good, you only live once? Is *that* what we should do...? Or should we hold fast to our faith, to our sure and certain hope that Jesus Christ and the forces of good have already won, that all we need to do is make sure, be certain, that we are indeed on the winning side, even when (*especially* when!) it appears as if Christ and His Church are losing or have already lost?

Now, that all sure sounds really awesome when we consider the grand cosmic scale of good and evil and the end of days. But there is something else to be said about what I encountered there on Mount Tabor; most of the Catholic shrines in the Holy Land are in the custody and stewardship of the Franciscans, including Mount Tabor, and not only is Mount Tabor the site of an ancient and beautiful church, the Church of the Transfiguration...but it is also the site of an active Franciscan friary, farm, and guesthouse. The friary is, of course, where the Franciscan friars live, and living in the guesthouse are people recovering from all kinds of addictions and substance abuse. And these folks live on Mount Tabor under the loving and healing care of the Franciscan friars, and they are the ones working the farm as part of their overall program of healing and recovery. What I found was that Mount Tabor is not just another dead shrine but in fact is fully alive with the glory of the Lord. Jesus was transfigured on that mountain to manifest His glory and majesty, and in a certain sense, He is *still* transfigured on that mountain every single day, even unto now, in the lives of the recovering addicts who live and work there. Christ glorified and majestic conquers sin and death, yes, on the grand cosmic scale...*and* in the lives and hearts and souls of every individual – of each man, woman, and child, in all of history, in all the world. Christ reigns in *your* life, in *your* heart, in *your* soul...if only you would let Him...if only we would do our part, if only we would receive the precious gifts of love and mercy that He so desperately wants to give to us. Again, from the Book of Revelation: “Repent!” says the Lord. “Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears Me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with Me.” We are given a choice, then, today and *every* day. Do we or do we not choose to let God in? Do we or do we not choose to open the door to our lives, our hearts, our souls, and thus invite Christ to live and reign in us forever and ever? Do we or do we not choose to receive the love and mercy which are the precious gifts of God? And will we or will we not remain on the side of the good when, at the end of days, Christ the Lord comes again and stands again at the top of Mount Tabor while all the world fights against Him and loses at Armageddon...? May it be that God grants us grace and blessings of strength and fortitude to hold fast and thus to remain at the side of Christ, come what may, now and forever!