

# “Listen to Him”

Psalm 50:1-6

Mark 9:2-8

“This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him.”

(Mark 9:8)

*celebrating*

Transfiguration Sunday

Dr. Paul T. Eckel

**H**e had become worried that his wife might be losing her hearing. So he settled on a test.

While she was cooking at the stove he stood well back from her and asked in a normal tone of voice, “Honey, what are we having for dinner?” No answer. He came a bit closer and tried again. Still nothing.

Finally he came right up behind her and asked, “What are we having for dinner?”

She whirled around and said, “For the *third* time, George, chicken!”

This morning it’s all about hearing.

## **Climbing a Mountain**

But first we need to climb a mountain. It rises up from the Plain of Esdraelon, also known as the Valley of Megiddo. The mountain is called Tabor – Mount Tabor – a traditional site for *The Transfiguration*.

On one of our pilgrimages to the Holy Land we ascended this holy mountain using local taxi drivers. They attacked the winding mountain roads with a vengeance! Eventually, hearts pounding, we all reached the summit safely.

Once there we scanned to the west. Twenty miles away we spotted Mount Carmel – the place where Elijah faced down the prophets of Baal. And to the

south, a bit beyond our sight, was Mount Nebo where Moses died.

Spreading out around us was what the Book of Revelation calls the valley of “*Armageddon*.”

But our purpose was not to take in the sites. We had come to this holy ground to reflect on what happened atop this mountain both for Jesus and his disciples.

“This is where things get a bit strange,” I told our pilgrims as we crowded together under the dappled shade of a cedar tree, trying to avoid the hot afternoon sun. “I say, ‘strange,’ because the Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke – all try to describe what was...well, indescribable.”

When you read the biblical account it becomes quickly clear that something very different is going on.

You feel the difference in descriptions like, Jesus’ “*clothes became dazzling white*,” and “*he was transfigured*,” and “*there appeared before them Elijah and Moses*.”

In addition to these unexpected goings-on we’re also told “*a cloud appeared and enveloped them*,” and “*a voice came from the cloud*.” It’s all very mysterious.

## He Was Transfigured

Peter, James and John, the inner circle of disciples, were there on the mountain top taking the unique spiritual event of Jesus’ Transfiguration.

But many of us here have had our own spiritual moments. Some might tell of being transformed by an insight, or experiencing the powerful sense of God’s presence, or catching a glimpse of something just ‘beyond.’

Others of you might report a physical healing, or a deliverance from evil, or guidance received that changed your life. As a result some have come to believe, “God has a special purpose for my life.”

Experiences like these cannot be produced or contrived. They have the ring of authenticity. However confusing your life may have become, you remain convinced what you saw and felt and heard on that occasion was real.

I am not suggesting Christians *must have* such luminous experiences. That’s not true. *All* of Jesus’ disciples *were not* on the Mount of Transfiguration, but they were all Jesus’ disciples anyway.

The point I am making is that Christ’ transforming power in our

lives often comes in ordinary ways, sometimes in extraordinary ways, but always in personal ways. Christianity is less a *religion about* Christ, and more a *relationship with* Christ.

Through their personal relationship with Jesus, Peter, James and John were given a glimpse into the glory of Christ. Each Christian has received some glimpse into Jesus. Treasure your experience! Hold precious Christ's transforming touch on your life.

### **Those Visitors**

Then without warning the scene shifts to include two newcomers who turn out to be old-timers – Elijah and Moses.

These two great Old Testament personalities “*were talking with Jesus.*” But don't overlook the fact that these men “*appeared before them*” all, disciples included!

When Mark's Gospel refers to disciples he not only thinks of the original Twelve, he has you and me in mind as well. We are our Lord's most recent followers.

Like those first question-asking disciples we in our day wonder: “Why have Moses and Elijah shown up?”

- Moses was the lawgiver. Is that how we are supposed to experience God – by obeying all the rules for right living?
- Elijah was *the* prophet. Is this how God makes himself know to us through the voice of some stirring preacher?

Christians believe both Moses and Elijah are essential. They are symbols of the Law and the Prophets which is a Jewish way of talking about the Old Testament. Jesus clarified his relationship to the Old Testament when he said,

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*

(Matthew 5:17)

Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament came through his obedience. His caring ministries, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection fulfilled what God intended in the Mosaic Law and Prophets like Elijah.

The disciples were captivated by what they were seeing. Peter thought it all so special he wanted to memorialize the moment. Let's “*put up three shelters*” to mark the occasion, he blurted out.

Today we'd probably say, “Grab your phone and take a shot

of this for the record.” Memorials and snapshots are fine for keeping the past alive, but that doesn’t fit here. “Christ *Memorial*” is a misnomer. Christ is not a memory from the past. Christ is our *present* reality!

## God’s Voice

That presence of Christ comes with yet another scene shift, this time it’s “*a cloud that appeared and enveloped them.*” It wasn’t a weather cloud. In the Bible clouds both conceal and reveal God’s presence. This cloud did both.

From the center of the cloud God revealed his heart: “*This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him.*”

But doesn’t this beg the question, who is God referring to as “*my Son.*” There were three figures on stage: Moses the Lawgiver, Elijah the Prophet, and Jesus the Servant. Which is God’s Son?

Watch how the drama in Mark’s story reveals God’s Son!

Verse 8 begins with the word “*Suddenly.*” Mark tends to move his Gospel along by telling us about things that happened ‘immediately.’

But the word Mark chooses to introduce the grand finale here is

unique. It is found nowhere else in the entire Bible. Mark has selected it carefully.

This word ‘suddenly’ not only means something happened quickly, it means something happened *unexpectedly* – without warning, in a flash...almost like a spotlight turned on in a darkened room. Not only was the light dramatic, it was directed.

In that sudden light it was obvious the stage was struck. The cloud had lifted, no historic visitors remained, the place was empty.

It says, the disciples “*no longer saw anyone with them – except Jesus.*” God’s intention became dramatically clear. Focus on the last man standing – Jesus! He is my Son. “*Listen to him!*”

Where are we to find answers to our religious questions? Who is an authority on matters of faith? Who really knows about God? Some people believe one person’s ideas are as good as another’s. Others are prepared to yield to theologians, pastors, priests or Sunday School teachers. They must know if anybody does.

But *God* is not convinced! God says, “*Listen to Jesus.*” God means, My Son is the one who

knows my heart as well as the human heart. If you are serious about wanting to learn and grow in faith “*Listen to Jesus.*”

## **Lenten Listening**

How are we supposed to do that today – “*listen to Jesus*”?

Well, here’s a possibility. Lent begins this week – a period of 40 days *not counting* the Sundays. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday is actually 47 days long, traditionally a time for Christians to reflect and pray.

What will you do with this high and holy Season? Some people ‘give up something’ for Lent, others ‘take on something’

‘Taking on’ works better for a lot of us. So, consider this. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson has divided the *Gospel of John* into 47 sub-headings. Sounds like a Lenten reading schedule to me!

Let me encourage you to use, buy or borrow a copy of *The Message* and read John’s Gospel during Lent. Down the centuries, millions of people have “*listened to Jesus*” this way and been eternally changed.

During Lent I’m going to try and preach on the great ***I AM***

statements of Jesus that are found in John’s Gospel. Through your Lenten reading, then, you will be “*listening to Jesus*” and preparing for Worship all at the same time.

What I said at the outset has turned out to be true. The message today is all about hearing. So, let me end with a confession.

## **All about Hearing**

I finally did it – I went to an audiologist a week ago. If you’ve ever done this, you know how it works. You take a seat in a small sound proof room with tiny speakers plugged into your ears and a button in your hand.

“Push it,” she told me whenever you hear a sound however slight. I started picking up sounds and pushing the button. Easy!

Then she began turning *down* the volume on her transmitter. It got harder and harder to hear. Finally, I assumed she had given up and quit sending me signals.

Wrong! She was sending – I just wasn’t receiving! It turned out I was having most trouble with sounds in the higher ranges – translated that means *female* voices.

Maybe this explains why Jan has occasionally said to me “For

the *third* time Paul, chicken!” I take some comfort in learning I’m not alone among people of my age. With the passing of the years, we all tend to lose a bit of our hearing.

That’s when it came to me, God is not silent. We hear God’s voice when we “*listen to Jesus.*” But are we tuned in?

How much static and commotion is drowning our His voice? How much of what Christ says are we actually catching and practicing?

Sometimes our Lord raises his voice and we *get it* loud and clear. But most of the time we’ve got to be quiet enough to hear His “*still small voice.*”

This is why we find ourselves singing and praying:

*Lord, speak to me,  
that I may speak  
in living echoes of Thy tone;  
As thou hast sought,  
so let me seek  
Thine erring children  
lost and lone.*