

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

March 5-6, 2011

Matthew 17:1-9

“Listen to Him”

There is a lot going on in our world right now that we ought to listen and pay attention to: the sweeping calls for government change and reform happening all over North Africa and the Middle East. Decades-old regimes and leaders are being ousted as mass protests pull thousands upon thousands of people together. The violence and bloodshed that have been part of these uprisings show that people and institutions will go to great lengths to hold on to power. The political instability of this region is surely having an impact upon gas prices around the world. It's downright painful to go to the pump! Wisconsin has become the epicenter of a national debate over union rights. The uncertainty about funding the federal government hits close to home for many of us here in the shadow of our nation's capital. Will there be a government shut-down? Same sex marriage legislation is all but assured in our neighboring state of Maryland, and the governor there has stated that he will sign this bill into law. It appears that the Biblical teaching of marriage as a divinely instituted relationship between a man and a woman is being lost in our nation. There is much going on around us that merits our awareness and attention. With so many things crying out to be listened to, does Jesus get lost in the shuffle? As we travel with Peter, James, and John to the mountain top and there view Jesus' transfiguration, the Father's voice that spoke there on the mountain top speaks to us today as well: **“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”** (Matthew 17:5). “Listen to Him” – that is the theme of the message on this festival of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

In today's Old Testament lesson (Exodus 24:8-18), Moses listened to and obeyed God's instruction to come up the mountain and receive from God's hand **“... the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment”** (Exodus 24:12). Moses encountered the Lord God on the mountain top in the midst of the cloud. Sound familiar? This points us ahead to that other mountain top of Jesus' transfiguration that we hear in the Gospel for today. In the Epistle lesson (2 Peter 1:16-21), Peter instructs believers on his eyewitness account of Jesus' transfiguration. He invites believers to listen and be attentive to the voice of God and to his prophetic Word that has come not from someone's interpretation, but from the Holy Spirit. And in that Gospel lesson today, Jesus' eternal glory and splendor are revealed for a brief, fleeting moment there on the mountain top. Flanked by Moses and Elijah who represent the Law and Prophets, Jesus appearance becomes like the sun itself for brilliance. Peter, James, and John listen to the Father's voice from the bright cloud, and then because they are overcome by fear, they listen to the voice of Jesus: **“Get up and do not be afraid”** (Matthew 17:7). Once more as they come down the mountain, they listen to Jesus, who orders them: **“Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”** (Matthew 17:9). By the power of the Holy Spirit that will be given to them at Pentecost, all will be made clear, but only after Jesus has suffered and died, and then risen from the dead.

Why is it that we have so much trouble with listening? We're distracted, and we're preoccupied with all the things that are happening around us. It can be very hard to focus. A number of years ago we were encouraged to multitask and work on multiple things at the same time. Remember that? The thinking was

that we would be more efficient and productive. In fact, recent research has debunked this as not true. “As technology allows people to do more tasks at the same time, the myth that we can multitask has never been stronger. But researchers say it is still a myth – and they have the data to prove it.” What we do, says neuroscientist Earl Miller, is not multitask but “switch from one thing to the next with astonishing speed” (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95256794>). So, our parents were right after all: you can only do one thing at a time. And so if we try to do something else while we’re listening, we’re not really listening, at least not very well.

We’re preparing to enter into the season of Lent, that 40-day period of penitence that precedes the joy of Jesus’ resurrection at Easter. In the verses preceding today’s Gospel lesson, following Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, Jesus speaks of what lay ahead of him as he and the disciples came down the mountain: **“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”** (Matthew 16:21). This is the central truth of our Christian faith: that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again to restore us to a right relationship with God our Father. By faith in what Jesus has done, our sins are forgiven and we are assured of eternal life. This is what we need to be listening to - today, tomorrow, and every day. I invite you to prepare yourself to enter the Lenten season and listen more closely and more attentively to the Lord. When we come into God’s house for Ash Wednesday worship, turn off the noise so we can listen and not be distracted. Prepare yourself by reading the appointed Scripture lessons in advance. Give yourself a little more time to get here early. Cut out the idle chit chat, not to be rude to fellow believers, but in order to listen to the Lord. Spend time in prayer before the service begins. Shut off electronic devices – cell phones and pagers – before entering the sanctuary. Listening, active listening, is something that does not happen by accident. We have to work at it.

There’s a lot going on in the world that’s calling out for our attention; screaming for us to listen to them. We certainly can’t bury our head in the sand and be naively ignorant of what’s going on around us. But as Jesus tells us, there is only one thing that is needful; only one thing that is necessary (Luke 10:42). And that is listening to Jesus, and in listening to him, receiving the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation that only He can bestow. May God help us to listen to Jesus with our whole being. Amen.