

Transfiguration Sunday – Year B

Feb. 22, 2012

Mark 9:2-9

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (v.7)

We have all heard of the 10 Commandments God gave Moses to Moses high upon yet another mountaintop, right? Of course we have. Just for fun, turn to your neighbor and list 5 of them. OK, I will give you a pass but why is it that God gave these commandments to Moses and subsequently to the people of Israel? Now, turn to your neighbor and unpack that question. Now you are wishing I would have just let you list 5 of the commandments, right. It's not so touch to get five such as: You shall have no other God's before me, remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, do not use the Lord's name in vain, do not steal, and of course my personal favorite, honor your mother and father (and your pastor). OK, I added 3 words to last one. We could list the other five but when we think about those that I just listed and the other 5 floating around in our head it doesn't really take that long to discover why God gave these commandments. They were intended to give life. Yes, life. Think about it. What two commandments does Jesus issue? Yes, "love the Lord your with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." For Christians, it seems as if these two should shape and guide nearly every decision we make and define our mission as a church. But the 2 Jesus gives really aren't new; but, rather a summary of the first 10. The first 3 commandments all have to do with our relationship with God and the final 7 have to do with our relationship with our neighbor. They provide order and structure for faithful living. These commandments were not intended to be a burden upon Israel's back, or ours for that matter, sinking us further

and further into despair because we can't keep them and subsequently then fall out of right standing with God. They weren't intended to be as if someone placed a weight upon our chest slowly making it more difficult to breathe slowly leading us to death. No, they were a gift – to bring life. Life which comes through our relationship with God. Life that comes through relationships with our neighbor whom God also created.

10 Commandments. But what if there were one more? An 11th Commandment. Have any thoughts what that might be? Perhaps, we hear it upon the mountaintop this morning, coming from the cloud that suddenly overshadowed Peter, James, and John and from within it a voice called out that said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Yes, there it is. "Listen to him." God frequently revealed Godself to God's people in the midst of a cloud in the Old Testament so if the awe-inspiring transfiguration of Jesus' appearance into something so brilliantly white the likes as had never been seen before, or the presence of the great leaders of old, Moses and Elijah, weren't enough then perhaps the presence and voice from the cloud finally got the message across to the disciples Jesus was the Son of God and they truly ought to listen to his words. If they had any doubts about Jesus, maybe now knowing how God has revealed Godself in the past they finally began to get it. Listen to Jesus. He is my Son. What they had failed to listen to and comprehend came just verses prior to our passage this morning in which Jesus foretold of his death ... and resurrection. But it appears Peter and the others only heard the part about Jesus' death. Peter goes so far as to scold Jesus for saying such a thing to which of course Jesus countered back telling Peter, "Get behind me Satan. For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Peter and the others simply couldn't comprehend how their expectations of the Messiah could align with what Jesus was telling

them. Their wants were for a Messiah with military might to overthrow the Roman regime. Their wants were for greatness and glory to sit at the right hand of Jesus. But Jesus' mission called for something completely different in saving the world and overcoming the power of sin and death. Listen to him! God said.

Who among us is a good listener? I like to think I am but I know all too well I have my moments when I either was not listening or chose not to listen to the person speaking to me. For example, when I was in third or fourth grade I was waiting with my parents for my older brother after a football game. We were standing next to one of those great big steel trash containers with the double lids on top and can only be picked up by the mechanical arms of a garbage truck. I was jumping up and grabbing on to it to see what was inside. My mother said, "You better not do that!" I should have listened because with the next jump I pulled the dumpster over on myself and before I knew it was being rushed to the hospital for 30+ stitches under my left eye. Or there are the multiple times when Amanda and I were much younger, pre GPS systems, and travelling and she would advise me to look at a map. Good advice but I often chose not to listen and went about my own ways, which often don't work so well. On more than one occasion we ended up along some gravel road or in some small, out-of- the way town in the middle of nowhere, finally looking at the map trying to figure out where in the world we were at. Or should I say, I was trying to figure out where we were at and wondering why I didn't listen to her as she said, "I told you so."

Communication is essential to any human relationship and it's also essential to our relationship with God. Too often we fail to actively listen for God's voice and rather choose to listen to the voices of the world or the voice within us that seeks to satisfy our own wants. Not

simply in our personal lives but also in our life lived out in community as the people of God. Rather than listening for where God would lead us and what God's mission is we seek first what we desire. What we want? I am guilty of it myself time to time. I want a Prayer Around the Cross service on Wednesday's in Lent. From listening and hearing many of you the Spirit has affirmed so do you many of you and that this service continues to bear forth the light of Christ in the midst of the darkness and feed our souls during our Lenten journey. But what if it no longer did? What if I was the only one wanting it and not listening? I think this is something each of us have to consider on a regular basis. When do our wants get in the way of the church's mission? When do our wants come at the expense of our neighbor? When do our wants need to be set aside for the sake of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and living that out in our daily lives?

So, just how do we listen? How do we hear the voice from the clouds? Or the voice on the mountaintop when so much of our life is lived out in the valley of everyday life? This is certainly one way. We gather for worship to hear the word of God proclaimed through the reading of scripture or through the sermon pastors diligently try their best to proclaim or through the songs that have spoken for centuries or through words of grace Jesus speaks through the sacraments or words of peace we speak to one another and certainly through prayer.

It is an amazing thing we can share anything with our God and be assured by the promise we are heard. However, it is a two-way street. We also must adhere to that 11th commandment, "Listen to him." Listen for Jesus! Listen for the Holy Spirit! Listen for God! How we listen as people of God entails silence and stillness. Focusing intently for the voice of the

Spirit as she faithfully sweeps across the stillness and into our hearts, minds, and souls. It's true we won't always hear an answer. And when we do it may not be a voice per say. More than likely it's a feeling, a hunch perhaps, or intuition we may call it. Perhaps, it's a calmness about a decision we are faced with. Perhaps, it's the strength to move forward. Perhaps, it's the freedom to let go of a past hurt. Perhaps, it the good news of grace that frees us to move past the guilt of not always placing our trust fully in God or failing to love to our neighbor. Whatever it may be, to listen to Jesus also means to be silent. To find our own mountaintops and venture there, as Jesus so often did, to pray and hear the voice of God on his journey in the valley, with humanity, to the cross, to the tomb, and then back to life.

As I write a sermon I spend a lot of time listening through words of scripture in multiple translations. Through words of scholars and preachers of yesterday and today. Through the voices of colleagues. And through prayer. Silent and still. Trusting God will speak. And this week I heard what I am about to do. Yes, I know for some it's uncomfortable. But our lives as Christians weren't intended to be comfortable all the time. When I believe the Spirit is leading me to something, I give it some time. I let it sink in. I continue to pray upon it and over and over again this is what I heard. So here it is. I am going to read our gospel passage again. This time in a slightly different version and I invite you to simply listen. Listen to the words. Listen for the images painted by Mark's words. As you listen, maybe it's one word you hear. Maybe it's one image that strikes you. Maybe it's one thing that puzzles you. Just perhaps, that is what you are to hear and then to continue to reflect on and pray about what that says to you. Your life. Your relationship with God and with your neighbor. To our community of faith. And so, now and always as the people of God in Christ Jesus, we listen.

Mark 9 New Living Translation (NLT)

² Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. ⁴ Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him." ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them.

⁹ As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.