

Transfiguration Sunday – Year A  
Matthew 17:1-9  
February 23, 2020

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

Last weekend was miserable. Influenza has a way of bringing life to a screeching halt and confining one to a “home arrest” of sorts. In my case, I was quarantined to Lauren’s room. I guess that’s what happens when you are off at college.

In between bouts of coughing and lots of sleeping there’s not a whole lot for one to do, other than watch a bit of TV. So, one night as I flipped through the channels, I came across a movie I have watched many times, *Twister* (1996). It’s a movie about a team of tornado chasers trying their best to place a newly developed contraption that, when hit head-on by a twister, will release hundreds of small ball-like sensors into the tornado and as they circulate round and round will provide real-time data to the team in efforts to learn more about tornadoes in attempts to increase warning times so people are able to more safely seek shelter from the storm.

There is a scene in which the team is gathered at an outdoor movie theatre, when suddenly out of nowhere a tornado breaks through the darkness of the night racing straight toward the patrons. As they flee from their cars for safety, one of the main characters and head of the team stands in awe as she stares at the swirling beast heading directly for her. It’s almost like she has been drawn into the meteorological masterpiece before her very eyes and wants to capture the moment.

As she is caught up in its majesty, her storm chasing partner and ex-husband calls for her to run and take shelter with the others but she seems not to hear; until, finally at the last second she heeds his advice, turns and runs into the safety of a nearby building.

Peter, James and John experience their own whirlwind of sorts, a divine miracle high atop a mountain as Jesus is transfigured right before their very eyes. His eyes shining like the sun and his clothes becoming dazzling white. And then, I can only imagine their mouth a gasp and eyes wide open, appears two of Israel's past heroes of faith, Moses and Elijah. They were in the presence of the Holy as Peter exclaims, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." This was one of those moments of awe, an encounter with God, and probably caught up in the moment, excited, and overcome with emotions Peter possibly wants to capture it.

Peter's declaration to build 3 dwellings, well intended as it may have been, clearly was not what God had in mind as before Peter can even finish his sentence the voice of God breaks through a bright cloud that has suddenly overshadowed the three, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased; listen to him!" (Pres. Active Imperative – Keep on listening – repeated action) And immediately Peter, James, and John fall to the ground overcome by fear.

It seems Peter, James and John have been captured by the moment at hand, with good reason, but they may be missing the big picture. There caught admiring the majesty, enraptured by the grand spectacle before them, when God implores them to simply "Listen." Listen to the voice of the One who called them into a new way of life. Listen to the One whose voice has calmed the waters, healed many and vanquished demons from the bodies in which they have pitched their own tents wreaking havoc on their innocent victims. Listen.

What are they to listen for? The glory they are witnessing is not the glory Jesus has just spoken of and will do so once again as they come down the mountain that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. What is at stake will transfigure the world the likes that has never been known before. There is no time to waste. Their time of gawking is done. Time to move from their fear and get on with Jesus' mission to rescue the world from the bondage of sin and death.

Just as they are called to listen, quickly they are called to action as Jesus comes to them, touches them and says, “Get up and do not be afraid.” But, unlike the tornado chasing movie star, our listening does not lead us into the safe confines of a building; but, on the contrary. Our listening often leads us back into storm. Our listening leads us down from the mountaintop moments of life with Jesus and into valleys often fraught with misery, oceans of swirly chaos, and deserts of injustice. The way of the cross Jesus calls us to is often a dangerous one; but it is one in which we experience the freedom won through the tragedy of the cross. Our listening for the voice of Jesus, the one who has rescued and redeemed us, the one who has compassionately touched us, calls us to “Get up. Do not be afraid.”

Do not be afraid of the unknown. Do not be afraid of past failures. Do not be afraid to fail again doing work in the name of Christ. Do not be afraid of the other. Do not be afraid to go out and proclaim the good news. Do not be afraid to offer a word of forgiveness. Do not be afraid to let go of the past. Do not be afraid to try something new. Do not be afraid of rejection. Do not be afraid to stand up and give voice for the voiceless. Do not be afraid to come alongside the sick, the hungry, and the imprisoned. Do not be afraid to journey with Jesus to the cross. Get up, he says, and follow me. I will be with you every step of the way.