

Scripture reference: Matthew 17:1-8 and 2 Peter 1:16-21

Today United Methodists all over the world are celebrating the Transfiguration. This has not been a significant event in the life of most churches, but it is important. Important enough that I want to be sure that we all have some understanding of what this event, this transfiguration, is all about.

The word transfiguration means: "a change in form or appearance; a metamorphosis an exalting, glorifying, or spiritual change." Like a threshold of sorts. When we cross a threshold going from one room to the next - the threshold is the point of change. This Sunday marks a threshold for us, a point of change for us - the point where a whole new season begins. This weekend we cross that threshold as we step from the season after the Epiphany into Lent. We are moving from a time of adoring and basking in the light into a time where we confront our own personal darkness. And if we pay attention, if we listen to the Word that surrounds us, we will discover that we are not alone as we look at, really examine our own darkness. If we listen we will come to know that the light that we have seen, has not been extinguished but lives inside each one of us.

For Peter, James, and John the time of transfiguration, of crossing the threshold, came on top of a mountain. The magic, the vision, the whatever it was that happened up on that mountain. Matthew says, "He was transfigured before them." Like it was no big deal. Like this kind of stuff happened every day. Can you imagine what it must have been like, looked like, to see Jesus shed his outer humanness and just let the God in him show through? He was transfigured before them. Kind of like Angels reaching out and pulling off the dull and dirty human robe he wore and slipping on his divine vestments. Like magicians who wave a curtain over their partner and as the curtain drops that person is in a different outfit... I'm just trying to get a visual and trying to get a bit of an understanding of what that must have been like for the three of them; because the transfiguration that day on the mountain wasn't for Jesus, it was for them to see Jesus for who he was. It was a time for the three of them to understand that this was a new beginning, a time for change. And then, to be sure they didn't miss it, there was the voice - the voice of God.

Did you hear what God said? "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him"
(Matthew 17:5)

Listen to Him...

Listen to Jesus...

When was the last time you listened to Jesus?

Most of us have heard Jesus speak this morning haven't we? And we do hear him at least every Sunday. We hear Jesus in our singing, our prayers, our bible readings, even in our conversations with each other. But listening involves more than just hearing noises.

Last month I started classes for my Course of Study - the theological classes that are required for me to maintain my position as a pastor - so I've added another "to-do" to my list of "to-do's" and I have many things on my mind. I have a tendency to "study" while I'm cooking, or sewing, or even watching T.V., and when I am "studying" (which nobody else can tell I am doing), I will occasionally hear Dave's voice but I'm not really listening to him. I hear the noise, but not what he has said. And then when it registers that he is speaking to me I will look up or over to get some clarification - you know, pretend I was listening and feign confusion - and I will see that he is no longer standing or sitting there. And this can be a problem sometimes... Periodically I am taken by surprise about some appointment, or practice for Ryan, or some other event that I knew nothing about... And sometimes that can cause a little friction...

Have you ever experienced that? So, through these experiences, I am reminded that listening is essential for a harmonious relationship.

It is the same for our relationship with Jesus; Listening is essential.

When is it that we listen to Jesus?

When life is good it's pretty easy to listen to Jesus. We clearly hear things like "your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most high" (Luke 6:35) And my favorite: "For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11). It's easy to listen when things are going well isn't it?

But what about when things are not going well? Or even better, what about when Jesus asks us to do something we don't want to do? "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) What does He mean I have to deny myself? We are to give up everything we have, to use everything we have - materialistic, emotions, time, skills, everything to serve others and help them hear and experience His love... Give up everything... right about here is where people stop listening to Jesus.

It's all good and wonderful to hear that we have been saved - we are quite happy listening to the fact that God wants to watch over us. But when it comes to having to give up or share some of what we believe is ours to benefit others... When we experience emotional or physical pain...

When life gets tough, when things are hard, it's not so easy to listen... I thought that in following Jesus our lives might be comfortable, without pain, without any burdens to carry around. Even if it can't always be sunshine and roses, shouldn't it be a little less uncomfortable, a little less painful, and a little less burdensome than if we didn't follow Jesus?

But if we listen, we hear that Jesus said following Him wasn't going to be easy. In fact, we hear Jesus say that in following him we are being asked to serve others, to endure persecution, and to struggle. That doesn't mean that we will struggle forever, that we have to hunker down and just be miserable for the rest of our lives. It means that the struggles we do have actually have a purpose. The difficulties we face have a purpose. We can only know this purpose by listening to Jesus.

Imagine having walked with Jesus while he was here on this earth. Imagine watching Jesus suffer as he did. The disciples must have been wondering what on earth was happening don't you think? But if they had been listening, they would have remembered that it was all part of the Messiah's plan. They would have known that the suffering he endured did not mean that he was not with God. Isn't that what they found out on the mountain? "This is my Son, Whom I love..."

Up on that mountain, those times in our lives when things are going so very well, we see that don't we? But we don't stay up on that mountain do we... We come down and we experience the struggles... That's when we have to remember that other thing that God said on the mountain, "... Listen to him."

Jesus not only told us, but showed us by his example, that sharing God, spreading the news of God wouldn't always be easy. We may not always see the purpose of our struggles, but in listening to Jesus we learn that our struggles are not in vain. We also learn that our struggles are not for us - our struggles are not for our own benefit - Jesus covered that for us, He struggled to give us eternal life with God.

I read a story about a woman who said that for years she felt guilty, as though she must have been doing something wrong because her life had been full of struggles. She had struggles with her family, with friends, and with people at work. She was sure God must be punishing her for something. She saw absolutely no value in her struggles... Then over a period of time as she was rereading Scripture, she realized that God wasn't punishing her, he wasn't calling her away from the struggles - asking her to try to end the struggles somehow, he was calling her to live in those struggling situations. And he was telling her that she was not struggling by herself. Not only was God with her the whole time, but she was walking beside others and struggling with others at the same time.

This woman's story is a perfect example of what Jesus has done for us and what he asks us to do for others. We are to serve - To serve our family, our friends, our enemies, our whole community. And we are to serve in the difficult times as well as in the good times. Remember, Jesus did not suffer for himself. He was already innocent. He suffered for you and for me. And if we listen, we are to do the same, and we are to remember also that God is with us in our suffering just as he was with Jesus in his suffering.

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you... And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, he will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."¹
Peter 5:6-7,10:

And so today, we recognize, we celebrate the transformation - that pivotal moment in our history where human nature meets God. We learn so much from this experience shared by Paul, James, and John. We learn that God is with us, that life is eternal... The appearance of Elijah and Moses, two men who left the earth long ago and who were now living in the presence of the Son of God echo the teachings of Jesus that God is not "the God of the dead but of the living". (Matthew 22:32) Up on this mountain, Jesus was the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. That time on the mountain identified Jesus to the people as the messenger and the mouth-piece of God, and all we have to do is "Listen...". AMEN