

PCIS Sermon, Feb. 22, 2004

**Text: Luke 9:28-36**

**Title: "Listen to Him!"**

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**Intro.** At the outset, before we turn to our text, I'd like to give you a focus question we will return to. The question is "**Who do you listen to?**" Our culture frames the way we hear almost everything. Specific people are after us about specific things. Advertisers are in our faces about how we spend our money. Politicians are in our faces about how we vote. Other people want other things. Is there anyone whose guidance you seek? Is there anyone you go out of our way to listen to?

This is Transfiguration Sunday. Our scripture text is Luke's record of the transfiguration. We're basically asking two questions about the event: What did it mean to Peter, John, and James, the disciples who experienced it? And, what does it mean to us?

**I. What did the Transfiguration mean?** To us it's a unique and dramatic story, but we view things from after the resurrection, and we know Jesus as God in human flesh, so in some important ways, the Transfiguration is just one more striking event in Jesus' life.

**Identity.** As Jesus' ministry progressed, the question of *just who he was* became a pressing one. In Luke's account, the Transfiguration comes in chapter nine. In the middle of chapter eight, Jesus calmed a storm, and the disciples "...were afraid and amazed, and they said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'" They thought they knew Jesus, but they kept being amazed by things he said and did.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus sent the twelve out to minister in pairs. This created quite a stir, and news of it got back to King Herod. Luke reports

Herod as saying, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he tried to see him.” All kinds of people were wondering who Jesus was.

Not long after that, Jesus asked the disciples who the crowds said he was. The response was that John the Baptist had been raised, or Elijah, or one of the prophets has returned. In other words, the crowds understood that God was at work in him.

Then Jesus asked the disciples who they said he was. It was then that Peter gave his famous answer, “The Messiah of God.”

**Jesus’ Response.** At this point, something happened we wouldn’t expect. Instead of Jesus congratulating them for getting the right answer, he first silenced them—he gave them a firm gag order. Then he told them of his own suffering, rejection, death and rising. Then emphasized to them of the cost of being his follower. Luke puts it this way:

“(21)He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, (22)saying, ‘The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’

(23)Then he said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (24)For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.’”

You see what’s happened: there’s rising enthusiasm for him among the people, but the people’s understanding of his identity and mission is flawed. They understand that God’s purpose is to deliver them, but they don’t understand the cost involved. Jesus is making sure that the disciples understand that this is not going to be easy. It will be costly for Jesus, and costly for them.

In the accounts of this sequence related by Matthew and Mark, this is the point at which Peter rebukes Jesus and tries to argue him out of his

suffering. Luke omits their argument, but clearly, the disciples are in a crisis. The messiah is supposed to come and set things right, and this guy is talking about his own rejection and death, and a life of self-denial for them.

It is at this point in the sequence that the Transfiguration takes place. It is Luke 9:28-36, (N. T. p. 69).

(28)Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. (29)And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. (30)Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. (31)They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure (“exodus”), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (32)Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. (33)Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. (34)While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. (35)Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (36)When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

For us, the story is dramatic enough, but for the disciples, there are allusions to earlier events in God’s dealing with Israel which give the event greater impact. God has a way of authenticating things by weaving details of his earlier acts into his later dealings with his people. For example, mountains are where people frequently meet God, and that’s where this takes place. Our O. T. text of the morning, Ex. 34:29-35 tells of Moses’ face shining when he returned from speaking with God. In vs. 29 of the Transfiguration story, not only did Jesus clothing become dazzling white, but his face was changed.

There are other allusions to Moses' in Jesus' ministry. Moses liberated the nation from slavery by leading the people in the exodus from Egypt. Vs. 31 speaks of Jesus "departure" which he will accomplish at Jerusalem. The word in our text rendered "departure" is in the Greek text the word "exodos." Unmistakably, it is a reference to Jesus' death in Jerusalem which will liberate his people from bondage to sin.

It seems logical that Moses is one of the O. T. figures who appeared to Jesus on the mountain. It has been suggested that Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets in their appearance to Jesus. In fact, there seems to be another reason for their being there: the ends of both of their lives were unusual. Moses died after God showed him the promised land, and God buried him—no one knows where. In the case of Elijah, he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. These two talked to Jesus about the end of his life.

The disciples were terrified as the cloud enveloped them. Why? When we see a cloud, we think water vapor, and if we're driving through a cloud on a mountain top, we slow down because of reduced visibility. But numerous times in Israel's history, the presence of a cloud meant the presence of God himself. So no wonder the disciples were terrified.

**Climax.** Because of this background, the event had greater impact for the disciples. But it all came to a climax quickly. As Moses and Elijah were leaving and the cloud was approaching, Peter blurted out the suggestion that they build dwellings for each of the three. Then the voice of God himself from the cloud answered: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Greater than all the history of God's dealing with Israel, represented by the allusions we have just seen, God says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Greater than Moses and Elijah—who were great and Godly men—God says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

And in the days ahead, when Jesus is nailed to a cross, and you think that all is lost, remember this day on this mountain. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

**II. What does the Transfiguration mean to us?** For one thing, it helps us refocus on who Jesus is. Life gets busy, and it's easy to lose focus. But God's words to the disciples are his words to us: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

At the beginning of the sermon, I gave a focus question: "**Who do you listen to?**" We mentioned the fact that the culture frames the way we're inclined to think about things, and that there are lots of people out there who want to influence us in specific ways for reasons of their own. But there is one who deserves our attention. There is one whose motives in influencing us are absolutely pure.

Do you have a place where you go to meet the Lord? I'm not thinking of a mountain; perhaps a chair and a table with a lamp and a Bible and a notebook where you go to meet God. Is there a place where you hear God's voice in the Bible and speak to him in prayer?

Is there time in your schedule firmly dedicated to doing this?

In the south, we have a vine called Kudzu. It grows so fast you can almost see it move along the ground. If there's Kudzu on the adjacent property, it's almost a daily struggle to keep it from taking over your yard.

Protecting my time with the Lord is a little like struggling with Kudzu. Something is always reaching for the dedicated time. And when I'm in my chair at the appointed hour, a thousand things that need my attention are suddenly standing in line to elbow their way into my thoughts.

Of course, God doesn't just want us to listen when we're in devotional mode. Listening to Jesus and doing what he says is away of life, and our daily, focused time with him supports that life in the midst of a culture which leads in other directions. But for this morning, perhaps it is sufficient to remind you of God's words to the disciples at the Transfiguration, and to urge you to be faithful to your time with Christ which feeds the life we, his followers, are called to live.

(Closing Prayer)

As a post script, let me mention that there are a couple of booklets on the table outside the front entrance if you'd like some help with personal Bible reading in your time with Christ. One is entitled *First Mornings with God*, and the other is *Quiet Times for Christian Growth*. They're just suggested Bible passages and questions to help you explore the passage. Feel free to take one if you like.