

**Listen to Him**

COMMUNION/Transfiguration

March 3, 2019

**Luke 9: 28-43a**

*<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup> Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup> I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup> While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in*

*convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And all were astounded at the greatness of God.*



Peter, James, and John are in a special situation today. These three are Jesus' inner circle within the group of twelve. They are blessed with an amazing experience as they ascend the mountain with Jesus. Throughout this series that we conclude today we have looked at ways that Jesus is a light to the nations. We have concentrated on our role as followers who are called to share that light with the world. In this role we are called to always share and model Jesus' love for the world. Jesus' love was a love for all people, even for our enemies, as I shared last week. This past week our denomination has wrestled with what it means and what it looks like to love all people like Jesus loved them. To love all people. Let us pray...

In our passage today, Jesus is both a metaphorical and literal light. As Jesus is praying, His appearance is changed: *"the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white"*. Jesus is transfigured right there before Peter, James, and John. And what is their first reaction? Let's build dwellings for Jesus and Elijah and Moses. The three are much like many people today who want to box Jesus in and keep His good news to themselves. Sometimes we are like Peter, whose first instinct is to build something to keep Jesus rooted right there with them. We want to box Jesus in and we want to hold onto a view of Jesus that we are comfortable with. Ironically, that view looks a lot like us. But throughout the scriptures and especially in the gospels we find a Jesus whose

love is much more expansive than our limited view. Today we are invited by the transfigured Christ to hold our images of Him lightly, to not limit the expansive light and love of Christ.

*Long ago in a small village lived an old man whom everyone considered infinitely wise. Whenever the villagers needed advice, they would come to the old man's door and knock. In the same village lived some young men who were a little rough around the edges. These young men came to resent the old man, who always seemed to be correct in the counsel he gave. So, these young men decided to prove him wrong.*

*The young men caught a small bird and decided to ask the old man if it were alive or dead. If he said that it was dead, the one holding the bird would open his hands and allow the bird to fly away. If he said that it was alive, the one holding it would squeeze it to death before opening his hands. They went to the old man's house, knocked on the door, and asked him, "Old man, we have an important question to ask you. Is the bird alive or dead?" The old man thought for a moment and then answered: "It's all in your hands".*

Often, we too come to the space where we have a choice to make: will I spread love or will I choose hate? Will I offer help to the one in need or will I turn away? Will I continue to look at the one who is not like me as my enemy or will I seek to understand and even love the other? Will I offer life or will I offer death? Like the old man said, it's all in our hands.





Peter and James and John were weighed down with sleep when they arrived on the mountaintop. But they stayed awake long enough to witness the transfiguration of Jesus and the arrival of Moses and Elijah. They were present enough to hear the conversation between the three men who were appearing in glory. Did you catch what they talked about? Jesus, Moses, and Elijah spoke about Jesus' departure. And not from the mountaintop. I love the phrase that describes this event: *"which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"*. It was the plan all along. Jesus came to die for our sins and to defeat the power of death. The plan would soon be accomplished. Over the course of the next six weeks we will journey with Jesus, through His earthly ministry, walking with Jesus through trials and temptations, through joy and pain, through death and eventually resurrection, arriving together on Easter.

While Elijah and Moses are walking away from Jesus, Peter gets his idea to build some shelters. Peter says, *"It is good for us to be here"*. It is something that Peter wants to continue, to maintain, to preserve. It is a glorious moment and must have been such an awesome experience. I cannot blame Peter for wanting to hold onto it. But the meeting is over. A voice from heaven speaks as a cloud comes and overshadows them. Peter, James, and John are terrified. Then the voice, the voice of God, speaks, saying, *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him"*! In this statement we learn two facts. First, Jesus shares deity with God. He is God's Son. Second, Jesus is God's spokesperson. If we want to know what God thinks about something, we should listen to Jesus. If we want to know what's on God's mind, we need only study Jesus, the Son.

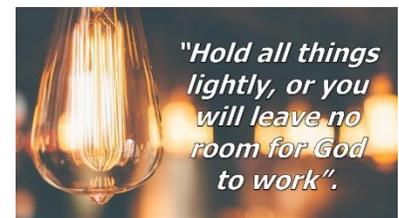


As Christians we are called to look to Jesus as the fullest revelation of God. He is the final word on salvation, on grace, on mercy, on love. As Christians we need to look first to Jesus, not first to any Old Testament prophet or New Testament apostle. In these last days God has spoken to us most directly by His Son. In the end, Jesus is our hope. He is our only hope. It is my belief that as we stand in judgment, we will be asked just one question. Jesus will ask, *"Did you know me?"* Did we put all of our hope in Christ? Did we profess faith in Him alone? Did we understand His love and make that our love? Did we love with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Did you know me? I think this is why God says to all disciples, *"Listen to Him!"* That is how we know Jesus. We listen to Him.



In our passage, we read that the next day Jesus and Peter, James, and John have come down from their mountaintop experience and find the other disciples in a deep valley. A man has brought his son to the nine seeking healing. The boy is frequently possessed by a demon that seizes him and causes him to shriek. The demon throws the boy into convulsions. During these convulsions the boy foams at the mouth and beats on himself. But the disciples cannot cast the demon from the boy. At this point Jesus could have asked these nine disciples the same question: do you know me? Do you know me?

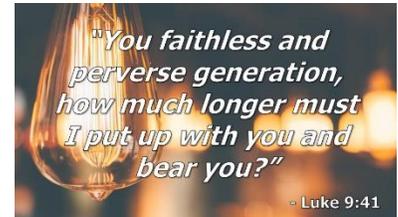
A spiritual director once said, *"Hold all things lightly, or you will leave no room for God to work"*. Do we build a shelter and seek to keep Jesus right where He is at?



That is the comfortable place for us. Do we desire to limit our understanding of who and what Jesus is? This is the easy place, the safe place.

Or, are we on a journey to continue to know Him more and more and more? When we hold tightly to a limited and constrained view of Jesus, we have a small view of God. Those nine disciples could not cast out the demon. They tightly defined their own ability to know and be like Jesus. Their faith was too small.

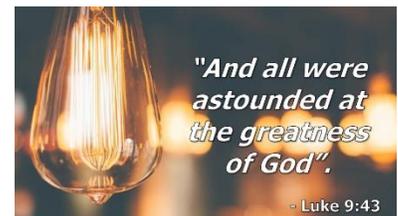
Jesus, recognizing this, says, *"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?"* How long will your faith



remain so small and so limited? We can be like the nine disciples, can't we? We can look at the situation we face or the challenge ahead or the circumstances that we find ourselves in and we lose hope. Whatever it is can feel insurmountable and we do not think that God can or will pull through. We lose faith in the belief that God loves us, that God can save us, that God will rescue us. We question God's plan for our life. I know that Jesus has looked at me at times, deep in doubt, not fully trusting, and thought this same thing. Anyone else here today?

In our passage, Jesus goes on to rebuke the unclean spirit, to heal the boy, and to return him to his father. Our passage concludes with this: *"And all were astounded at the greatness of God"*.

Yes, at times we can disappoint God. We can stumble in doubt. We can have too small a trust in our faith.



We can fail to be the love that God desires us to be. We can treat people like they were our enemies instead of just as different than us. And yet God loves

us. And yet God loves us. In those moments, when I have been of little faith or have doubted or have questioned God's love for me, it matters not to God.

God loves me. I too am astounded at the greatness of God's love. It brings me back around to the command that God gave on the mountaintop: listen to Him!



When I hear this command in my heart, I return once again to the Word, to my trusted Bible. I delve into the Word of God for hope and promise. I read the stories of Jesus' love for me and others like me: sinners in need of loving grace.

And I think about my call to be that same love to others in the world. I think about the power I have to spread love, to offer a hand to one in need, to seek to understand the other as more like me than different, to offer life. My friends, you too have the same choices to make.



*There was a man who was fishing beside a river. Suddenly, he fell into the water. He was not very good at swimming, but he found a log to hold onto. The log could barely keep him afloat, but he held on tightly for dear life. Unfortunately, the river was about to go over a huge waterfall. The man could hear the roar of the water and see the mist from the falls. Right before he reached the edge, a man on the side of the river threw him a rope. The man had two options. First, he could hold tightly to his log and go over the falls to a certain death. Second, he could let go of the log and grab the rope and be*

*pulled to the shore. This is the same choice we face with Christ. First, we can hold tightly to our old life and hope that we will stay afloat, but the reality is that we are headed toward destruction. Or, we can let go of whatever gives us "false hope" and reach out to Christ for salvation.*

Maybe it is us who falls in the river. When we are in the river we cling to whatever we think will save us. We continue to cling to it, even when we see danger and destruction on the horizon. In those moments, it is faith that can offer us hope. Do we grab ahold and cling to Jesus with all that we are? Or do we cling to the log, to self, to our own abilities?

We find ourselves in both circumstances though. Sometimes we are the one standing on shore with the rope. Maybe it is with faith that we can reach out to someone in need. The light and love of Christ can bring life and hope to one lost in the dark, healing to one who feels broken. Do we throw out the line, do we offer our love to the one in need? Or do we watch them drift by?

When we hate, turn away, criticize, ignore, avoid, belittle, misunderstand, boast, insist on our own way, we spread hate, apathy, division, embitterment, death. When we notice, affirm, encourage, thank, honor, listen to, consider, rejoice, stand with, we spread love, hope, peace, faith. When we are able to extend life to others, we are all transfigured and transformed by God's grace.



As we approach our Lenten pilgrimage, we are bid to listen to Jesus and imitate His life, reflecting and expanding God's glorious light to all nations and peoples. May it be so for you and for me as we journey

together through this Lenten season. Amen.

Video: "Thy Name" (3:24) – *at end of worship – preparation for Lent...*

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How has your desire to limit or keep Jesus the same worked against growth in your faith? In what ways has Jesus grown in you?
- 2) When we hold too tightly, God cannot work. What situation in your life are you holding too tightly? Pray to release it to God so He can work.
- 3) How can you encourage, affirm, notice, listen to, rejoice with this week as a way to "deal life"? How are you going to make that happen?