

Transfiguration

Text: Luke 9:28-36 (NIV)

²⁸About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³²Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Theme: Listen to Him!

When God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel at Mount Sinai, He spoke the words directly to the people from heaven. God’s glory left them so afraid that they pleaded with Moses, “*You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or else we will die.*” (Ex 20:19,22) God did what they asked for. He called Moses to the mountain, and he became God’s spokesman to the people. In Deuteronomy 18 God promised more prophets, and one prophet who would be greater than all. Moses said, “*The Lord you God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, for your brothers— you must listen to Him.*” (Dt 18:15) In today’s text God’s voice thunders again from heaven to tell the disciples those same words to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy, “Listen to Him!”

I. The problem is that we don’t like to listen.

The people in the Old Testament didn’t listen well. When Moses approached God, the Lord said, “*Tell the Israelites this ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.’*” What happened before Moses even came down the mountain? Israel made a golden calf and began to worship it. Later the Israelites began to worship the gods of the Canaanites. They worshiped the Baals and Asherahs. God sent prophets such as Elijah to call the people from their false worship, but few of the people listened to them. Elijah was always running for his life, even after he proved that the LORD is God. The people in the Old Testament seldom listened to the prophets that God sent, such as Moses and Elijah. They listened to the false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear. They fashioned gods with their own hands, rather than to worship the God who had redeemed them from their bondage in Israel and gave them the promised land.

Jesus’ disciples were no better. Over and over again Jesus told them that He would be handed over to the Gentiles. They would mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the 3rd day He would rise from the dead. Then it often says something like this, “*[The disciples] did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were*

afraid to ask [Jesus] about it.” (Lk 9:45;18:34) They didn’t listen to Jesus. They had their own ideas of what it would mean that He was the Christ, and they were His disciples. While Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with three of His disciples, the others were trying to cast out a demon with their own power. Then they began to argue about who was the greatest. Then they wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village. Peter also had trouble listening to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw the Lord in all of His glory and Moses and Elijah. When Moses and Elijah were leaving, Peter wanted to stop them. He said, *“Lord, it’s good for us to be here. Let’s put up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”* He didn’t know what to say, but he thought that he had to say something. It was then that God’s glory overshadowed them, and the Father said, *“This is My Son, whom I have chosen, listen to Him.”* The disciples had a terrible time listening until Pentecost.

How well do we listen to God? I’m not talking about dreams and visions and things like that. I mean the Bible. Very often we don’t listen very well either. I can think of many examples: I once heard a person say that she believed that the Bible speaks clearly against something that she was doing, but the Holy Spirit told her that in her case it was okay. We will often begin our discussion of religious matters with the words, “Well, I think,,,,” rather than, “The Bible says...” Last summer I saw wood carvings by a man who claimed to be inspired by God. He seldom read the Bible and never went to church. Yet, he thought that God inspired him. Each one of the carvings wasn’t quite biblical, and one of the stories wasn’t even in the Bible. Last summer I heard a quote in which a man said, “The Bible doesn’t reflect what many Christians today believe.” It is tempting to form our opinions about God without listening to what He says in the Bible. We think that the Bible is true except for when we don’t like what it says. Sometimes we think that God speaks directly to us in ways that contradict the Bible. Very often our opinions about God are how we think He should be and how we think He should act, not how He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. We are often not good listeners either.

II. What do we hear when we listen to Jesus?

The answer is words of law and gospel. Think of the Old Testament prophets. They uncovered Israel’s sins and called the people to repentance. Moses called on the people to repent after they made the golden calf. Elijah called them to repent from their Baal worship. Amos called on them to repent from their injustice. Hosea pleaded, *“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him: Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously...”* (Hosea 14:1) The prophets called the people to repentance and hope in the promised Savior who would take away all of their sins. Isaiah wrote, *“We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* (Is 53:6) The prophets’ message was one of the confession of sins and forgiveness of sin through the Savior whom God would send.

That is also what Jesus spoke about on the Mount of Transfiguration. It says that He was speaking to Moses and Elijah about His departure. The Greek word is “Exodus.” At the time of the Exodus the Passover Lamb, which was offered, spared the people of Israel and allowed them to leave their bondage to go to the promised land. Jesus is our Passover Lamb. He offered Himself on the cross in our place just as the Passover lambs were offered. He has freed us from our sins. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were speaking about Jesus’ Passion which would accomplish our salvation. That was an

Exodus that was far greater than the Exodus, which brought Israel out of their slavery because Christ was leading us from our bondage to sin to His glory in heaven.

God's Word still speaks that same law and gospel to us today. It shows us our sins. God's Word is often hard to listen to because it condemns things that we love to do. It tells us that we need to repent and turn from those sins. But then God's Word points us to Jesus as our Savior. We see the cross and see the place of our redemption. In Baptism like Israel we passed through water that leads us to the promised land. Jesus gave those disciples a glimpse of His glory and the glory that we will share with our Lord. It is by repentance and trust in Christ, that we will reach that shore.

There is one more interesting thing about this text. It says that Peter's eyes and the eyes of those who were with him were heavy with sleep. They missed most of Jesus' transfiguration because they were napping, just as they did in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's tempting for us to take a spiritual nap when we don't listen to God's Word or when we despise that word. But today the Father's voice wakes us up too as it thunders, "Listen to Him!" May God give each of us those ears to listen, that we may listen to our Savior's voice and follow Him through this life to His glory in heaven.

Amen.

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