

# **Sermon for February 26, 2017 – “Just Listen!”**

## **Westwood First Presbyterian Church**

### **Pastor Jeff Colarossi**

Transfiguration Sunday, Year A – Texts: Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9

Did you ever meet someone famous? I mean really well-known? What did you do? What was your reaction? There was study done a few years ago and researchers found that in this situation, generally speaking, people are so overwhelmed that they do one of two things. They either – one – start talking a mile a minute with no sign of stopping, usually saying something embarrassing...Or – two – they find themselves at a complete loss for words. They become tongue-tied and remain silent. I tend to fall in the first category, but I've often wondered what I will do when I finally meet Jesus. What about the rest of you? Ever thought about it?

Way back in 1999, there was actually a popular song by the Christian group “Mercy Me” that asked that question. It was called “I Can Only Imagine” and part of it went:

“Surrounded by Your glory – what will my heart feel?

“Will I dance for you Jesus – or in awe of You be still?

“Will I stand in your presence – or to my knees will I fall?

“Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all?

“I can only imagine...”

Well, as it happens today we don't have to imagine what an encounter with Jesus might look like because that's what our gospel reading is all about. But, it's so much more than that. The Transfiguration is one of those stories that are “theologically dense.” I've always thought of it as a trailer for Easter, a hint of the glory to come. But to me the most touching element is the subplot, a moment when three ordinary people find themselves in the presence of greatness, in the presence of the divine. Whenever there's a mountain in the Bible, something extraordinary usually takes place, and more often than not God reveals himself in some way. Jesus taught by the seashore and on the hillside, but for the moment of Transfiguration He took His three closest disciples to a mountaintop. There, two towering figures of the ancient faith appeared: Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet, both had their own mountaintop moments. We read one of Moses' just a moment ago. Matthew doesn't tell us which mountain this was. We don't know whether it was Tabor, Hermon, though both have been suggested as possibilities, or whether it was Mt Sinai, or the Golan Heights. We don't know how long it took the men to climb. We also don't know whether they had any clue about what they were about to see. What we do know is that the sight of Jesus transformed before them was so hard to describe that it left all three synoptic Gospel writers grasping for metaphors. In addition to His face shining like the sun, Matthew said his clothes were dazzling white. Mark described them as whiter than any bleach could make them, while Luke recounts that Jesus' face changed and that His clothes were glittering white like a lightning flash. Peter wrote of seeing “majestic glory.” Of course, this was no surprise to Moses and Elijah. But Peter, James, and John were completely at a loss, each of them responded differently.

Peter, the extrovert and man of action, started talking; going on about building three tents, or shelters, or booths, or tabernacles (depending on which translation you read). Truth is, scholars aren't entirely sure what Peter was talking about. Some suggest it had something to do with the Feast of Tabernacles, but I'm wondering if maybe he just started talking because he - didn't know what to say, and suggested a course of action because that's what he always did.

John said nothing, but we learn that all three of them fell face down in awe. John is assumed to be one who wrote book of Revelation which were based on the visions he saw while on the island of Patmos. So, maybe he just had a knack for knowing what to do in response to divine revelations. Or maybe, like some, he was the kind of person who clams up in the presence of greatness.

And James? Well, he didn't say anything either. And, we really don't know much about him aside from the fact that he was Zebedee's son and John's brother. Lots of folks confuse him with Jesus' brother James. So, we might very well ask: "Okay, just what was James doing there?" In that sense he represents people that have what's known as "impostor syndrome", you know, those who believe that despite all the evidence their success is undeserved and is dismissed as a result of luck, timing or a combination of both. The kind of person who sees everyone else doing the right thing, and worries that they don't belong there. "Wow," I imagine him thinking, "Peter always knows what to say, and John knows what to do. Why am I here?" Ever ask yourself that question? How easy is it to spend time worrying about whether we're doing things right or saying the right things? Or wondering whether we should even be there in the first place? It seems to me that it'd be pretty easy for someone to get a glimpse of God and immediately feel overwhelmed by our own inadequacy. But what I love is that all three disciples get the same response. They get the voice of God. It scares them, saying: "**This is my Son – the beloved...“Listen to Him!”**"

Listen to Him...Now, if you ask me, listening to Jesus sounds like pretty good advice. No matter who's telling you to do it. But, when it's the voice of God, well, I think we disobey at our peril! For those of you who keep track of things like this, and have looked at a calendar lately, you may realize that Ash Wednesday is only three days away. Ash Wednesday is, of course, the day which marks the beginning of Lent. As gloomy as that may sound, this is very good news.

So, here's the thing. Most of us are so **distracted** by our gadgets, so **busy** with our work and our lives, so **addicted** to our pleasures, so resistant to our depths, that a nice long trip in the wilderness might actually be **exactly** what we need. Certainly, no one can make you go but if you've been looking for some excuse to head to your own mountaintop and spend some time with the Lord, well, this is it. If you've been looking for some way to get rid of some of that excess baggage in your life, look no further. If you've sensed a need for change and transformation – *ta-da* – here's your chance. Here's your chance to enter the bright cloud of unknowing and listen for whatever it is God has to say to you. Tent or no tent, booth or no booth, here's your chance to encounter God's contagious glory so that a little of it rubs off on you.

Today you've heard a story you can take with you when you go, wherever you go. It tells you that no one has to go up the mountain alone. It tells you that sometimes things get really scary before they get holy. Above all, it tells you that there's someone standing in the center of the cloud with you, someone shining brightly, someone worth listening to. So, if you're the kind of person who acts and speaks before you think. Stop talking! You don't need to do anything in the presence of God, just listen! If you're the kind of person who needs time to process everything, who has something to say but just freezes and says nothing, Don't panic! You don't need to say anything in the presence of God, just listen!

And, if you're the kind of person who just stands there feeling as if everyone else has a right to be there but you got in by accident, Relax! You don't have to justify your existence in the presence of God, just listen! Stop...Breathe...Because we too are God's sons and daughters. We too are beloved...We are his...And whatever comes next – we'll be up to the task...

Just! Listen!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.