

Stop, Look and Listen
February 14, 2010
Luke 9:28 – 36

Our scripture reading this morning follows a text we have read previously this year; the reading in which Jesus ask his disciple two questions, the first being, “Who do people say that I am” and the second which asks, “Who do you say that I am.” If you recall, Peter was spot on in his response to the second question when he answered, “You are the Messiah . . . the Christ of God.” Jesus didn’t offer Peter very much praise for his response. Rather, the bible tells us that, Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.” In turn, Jesus then explains to them that, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Instead of praising Peter for the Epiphany that offers, Jesus warns them that such knowledge can be and will be harming to both him and the disciples. With such knowledge comes responsibility; “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me, said Jesus, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

This is where our reading begins this morning. Please stand as you are comfortable for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

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.

Let us Pray.

God of all creation - we know that nothing can come of nothing - and that without seeking you we cannot find you, and without praying to you we cannot hear you. Help us Lord to seek you and to pray to you each day, just as your Son Jesus did. Compassionate God, you have given us your word by which we might know more about your will and way for our lives. You too have commanded us to listen to your son Jesus. Help us Lord to listen to you. Loving God - we have heard the testimony of the saints that you are all around us and that you support us and strengthen us daily making it possible for us to draw each breath. Help us to see your hand in our lives and in the lives of others. Give us the faith to see, hear, and feel your presence. In the meditations of our hearts and in the words of my lips, help us to learn from you today. All this we ask in the Wonderful and Holy name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; giving you the praise, honor and glory that you deserve. Amen.

The transfiguration story of Jesus is a difficult one to digest for many of us. At first glance, there may appear to be more questions than there are answers. Why did Jesus make this journey to the mountain following Peter's revelation of his divinity? Why did Jesus only take three of the disciples with him to the mountain top? What was the purpose of the transfiguration and what purpose did the presence of Moses and Elijah serve? We know that during the reading of Jesus Baptism that God had already confirmed Christ to be God's son. Why now does God once again speak audibly to the disciples? To answer each of these would take quite some time, a lot of research and would probably, once again, leave us with more questions than answers; or would it? The reading this morning doesn't have to be as complicated as I think that many of us like to make it out to be. Much like the warning that precedes it, the one that instructs the disciples to tell no one of Christ's divinity, our reading this morning also offers us some simple instruction. Simply stated, we are to *listen* to what Jesus has to say.

It is easy for us to view the story of the Transfiguration of Christ as a *supernatural thing*; one of those events - like many we read of in the bible - that for us happened so long ago. The kind of event that we easily separate ourselves from because it is the sort of event we are accustomed to hearing of through biblical reflection rather than the kind of story we are accustomed to expecting in our modern lives. Quite honestly, the Transfiguration for many of us becomes one of those stories that we wouldn't mind skipping over. It's a mysterious story, one full of supernatural themes and for many of us it holds no more meaning and interest than the stories we read about or see portrayed in modern films of fantasy and science fiction. Where is the application for us in our modern lives? What more can we take away from this event than from let's say; the feel good morals to such stories as *The Lord of the Rings* or Star Trek's *The Undiscovered Country*; both of which offer us the author's own insight into their search for a

higher power and meaning. If I had lived during the time of Jesus and had been offered the choice between listening to his teachings first hand, watching him heal people or sitting down to supper with him and seeing the his Transfiguration on the mountain top, I think I would have chosen the former. To have sat in the presence of Jesus, already having the knowledge of his deity as expressed by Peter, knowing that he would have done so even though I am gay and a sinner – this sort of experience for me would have meant so much more because it is something that I could take with me, find hope and meaning in and hold onto. More importantly, I would have felt comfortable and safe in experiencing my God in this way; the sort of experience that required very little of me and a whole lot in God.

But for Peter, James and John their experiences with Christ up to this point were not enough; they were willing to follow Christ wherever he lead them and in being faithful to do so, they were led beyond their comfort zone; to a place that challenged them and offered them simple, yet powerful insight into the nature of their relationship with Jesus and their God. Today, Peter, James and John get a taste of Glory – like Moses when he was summoned to the mountain top and spoke with God as the Spirit of God descended on the mountain as mist. Peter, James and John have one of those experiences that for all intents and purposes should have transformed their own lives; except our reading tells us that they weren't exactly sure what to do with it. Poor Peter, the same Peter who only eight days before had made such a wonderful acclamation about the deity of Christ when as he responded, "You are the Messiah . . . the Christ of God" now finds himself lost for words. Peter, who we are told was tired and sleepy, began to practically babble. The reading states, "He did not know what he was saying." In reaction to all wonderment and glory of God that had been revealed to them, all Peter could manage to suggest was that they get busy putting up tents so that they could preserve the experience.

Of course Peter was only trying to be *helpful*. Haven't we all had a time when we thought it necessary to DO something in response to our own encounter with God? However well intentioned our responses may have been; at last we begin to see meaning in the story of the Transfiguration; a beautifully stated reminder that sometimes we are not expected to do anything more than to *Stop, Look and Listen*. *Stop* trying to make it on our own – *Look* to the one who has been sent to deliver us and simply - *Listen* to what Jesus has to say. When we hear the voice of God saying, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him," we can practically imagine God's annoyance that Peter didn't have enough sense to remain silent at such a moment. Recall that the Old Testament writing tells us that Moses was told that he couldn't see God and live. Perhaps Peter should have been told that he couldn't see God and talk so much.

Again, Peter is like so many of us. We often try to talk our way into understanding; we try to process an experience in order to absorb its meaning and to make it a meaningful part of who we are. Then there are some of us who try to take a deeply spiritual experience and carve it into stone; build tents, make rules, harden our traditions and say, "We've always believed this way, don't it this way, said it this way . . ." Many believers, maybe even some of us here today, have tried to take the experiences of our lives and make it into something we can hold onto; something comfortable for our lives; something that will not challenge and best of all, will not change us either.

Our reading today is about the *Transfiguration* of Christ. Why not, the *Transformation* of Christ? You see, to transfigure is much more than just a transformation; more than just a change. The word transfiguration comes from the same word that gives us the term *metamorphosis*. Yes, there is an implied emphasis on the dramatic change in one's appearance, but it also speaks to "the changed state that results" from this change in appearance. A

caterpillar does more than transform into a butterfly; it is transfigured. Its appearance is dramatically changed, and so are its resulting abilities. A caterpillar cannot fly, its travel is limited, yet as a butterfly, the sky is the limit, so to speak.

How important is this revelation, this awareness, for us as we close the Season of Epiphany and prepare ourselves for the Season of Lent? Here we are on the near edge of a Season that provides for each of us an opportunity to journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem and the mount of Calvary and in turn we begin to prepare ourselves for a coming *mountaintop experience*; the one that will bring to light the harsh reality of the cross. Experiences that will reinforce last week's talk about "First Importance" and the need to remember the pain and suffering of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. One that will once again offer an exhilarating glimpse of glory; a bright flash of light and an indescribable moment when everything will not only seem changed in appearance but will be changed forever.

As for today, however, in our modern lives and in our daily living we may not be up on an actual mountain, but the experience of watching this community of faith grow, not only in physical number, but deeper and deeper in our spiritual growth and relationship with our God and with one another; *this* is a mountaintop experience in its own right. New Day Worship Center is a different church than it was just last week and in continuing to follow the path that has been laid out before us by our God I would not hesitate to say that we will not be the same church next week as we are today. That is, if we continue to seek, listen, and reach out to those in our community and in the surrounding areas of Northeast Georgia and the Carolinas. We have received so many into this community of faith and as each one of you has joined your lives and your experiences with ours, a transfiguration has occurred. One that offers more than a change in appearance, but offers a change that inevitably will last forever. The church is not a static

entity, that is, the faith of our ancestors is not dead, but rather is continually transforming; transfiguring into something more. As we continue to grow as a faith community, I challenge each and every one of us to encourage one another and to love one another and offer a community that will not expect everyone to do as they have always done, to believe what they have always believed or to worship in the way they have always worshiped. We, as a community of faith will not put up tents or carve anything into stone. We will, instead, stand still here for a moment each week; continually aware of our freedoms in Christ and we will glory in the presence of our God before we go back down the mountain and tend to the work we have been given; a work that has called each of us on a journey to follow Jesus in our daily lives.

Some of you may find yourselves in awe of the presence of God this morning or wondering where you might find your own mountaintop experience. Know this morning that God is in all the earth; in all of creation. In every moment and every experience that the world has to offer us, sometimes broken, yes, but beautiful still the same, the presence of God is strong. We don't have to climb a mountain to find God. We may, however, need to turn off our cell phones, power down our computers or our televisions long enough to notice the presence of God in our lives. Our ancestor Jacob, in his own moment of epiphany, once said, "God is in this place, and I wasn't aware of it." God is in the beauty of nature, in all its glory. God is in those moments of unconditional tender love we share not only with one another and others closest to us, but those moments shared between us and those we do not know – those who are given to us briefly; offering us an opportunity to show Jesus to them, if only for a moment. God is present even in our suffering; in those moments where we are most desperate for rescue, restoration and our own resurrection.

Every time we experience love, forgiveness, healing, or God's grace in our lives; we are changed forever. Every time we gain a glimpse, just a glimpse or a sense, perhaps, of God's presence in our lives, the presence that fills all of creation including your life and mine, we are changed forever. Only once we are change can the love we show one another and the love we offer to the world be empowering. The love, peace, justice and healing we work for in our lives each day; the forgiveness and reconciliation we seek and the hope we offer to those we meet, no matter what they've done and no matter who they are, this love can change the world; transfigure the way the world looks, the way it feels, the way it is, not just today or in a single moment of time, but in all of the days ahead. It can be change forever, for all of us, for God's children who are loved and blessed by God.

Lent lies ahead of us. The road to Jerusalem is before us. It is my prayer this morning that each of you walks enlightened and aware of the presence (or absence) of God in your life and that each of you proceed accordingly. In Christ wonderful and holy name, Amen!

Much of today's sermon was inspired by the writings of Kate Heuy and can be cross referenced at <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/february-14-2010.html>.