

Sermon, Transfiguration, March 3, 2019

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

If any of you has ever been on an athletic team and done wind sprints, you’ll know what the ACME Thunderer is. If any of you has ever been coach or a referee, you’ll know what the ACME Thunderer is. (Ask if anyone recognizes the reference.) It’s a small, stainless steel whistle with a loud, shrill, overpowering sound, designed to get people’s attention. Jesus’ transfiguration on the Holy Mountain is a lot like a blast on the ACME Thunderer. “Hey! Listen up!!”

I know that we all have dozens, or maybe hundreds of voices clamoring for us to listen to them. We have voices within, telling us that we don’t have the right stuff, or that we’ll be all right... or that we’re entitled to better things than we have. We have the voices of our parents, teachers, coaches and scout leaders from childhood telling us to persevere. We have the authors we discovered in high school and college telling us to think *more deeply*. We have the professors who impressed us with their knowledge, insights, and authority in their disciplines, reminding us to think *more carefully*. We have sweethearts, spouses, siblings, and friends telling us, whether through encouragement or criticism, that we can probably do better. We have the editorialists who are convincing in their analyses of national and world events: it’s never been better! Or... we’re about to go over the edge!

I’m guessing that most Americans get most of their information about current events and popular culture from network and cable television outlets. Celebrity commentators urge us to pay attention to their versions of our national stories. If it weren’t difficult enough to do the fact checking behind their reports, we sometimes wonder what are the partisan or commercial forces behind the news desks, or behind the research findings concerning public health issues. Are those who are supposed to be the objective voices—whether in government or in the news media—helping to inform and guide the public about the things that matter most to our common life? How helpful is it when commentators routinely deride, ridicule, and dismiss their counterparts as silly, phobic, fake, or hateful? Can any of you take me to a clear and consistent teaching of Jesus or the apostles that tells us that this is how we should speak of, or treat our fellow citizens?

If knowing what is true, and embracing what is good were simply a matter of paying attention, then we wouldn’t have words in our vocabulary like perjury, dishonest, fraudulent, disingenuous, tendentious, dubious, manipulative, misleading, or untrustworthy.

How do we know whom to trust? How do we know what analysis best matches reality? How will we decide what information or guidance will be most useful to addresses challenges of our lives? What can answer our deepest needs? What can make us whole, or restore what is disfigured in us? **To whom will we listen?**

Here is a simple reading of today’s mysterious event of the Transfiguration that Peter, James and John have all bet their lives on. Peter’s 2nd epistle is explicit about what he experienced

there: "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain."

What is the significance, then, for us, of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus on the Holy Mountain?

I believe that it is one of God's many demonstrations of love for us, answering two of the deepest spiritual questions of the human race: How can I be a good person? How can we know what God wills for us?

In Moses, all Jesus' contemporaries would have recognized the law-giver. Here are the ideas, principles, and patterns that one can study, memorize, and apply to incline toward the right and to avoid the wrong. Give your mind to the **law of God**, and you will be on the sure path of the good life.

In Elijah, all Jesus' contemporaries would have recognized the epitome of God's prophetic voice. Here is the heart of God, passionately and powerfully calling to human hearts to give their deepest, fiercest loyalty and their most generous response to justice, to the compassionate care of one's neighbor, to mercy.

This moment on the mountain is another way of saying that Jesus both fulfills and supersedes what has come before, both the Law and The Prophets. Jesus embodies both the law of God and the expressive, powerful compassion of God. As John tells it, Jesus is the expressed mind of God, giving us all the critical information we need about how to be God's children, those who know, choose, and do the right thing. I love the verse in our Battle Hymn of the Republic: "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was borne across the sea, with a glory in his bosom **that transfigures—i.e., changes into Christ's likeness-- you and me...**" Transfiguration was not meant to begin and end in that ancient episode in the Galilean highlands. Are you being transfigured because of Jesus' place in your life?

Our spiritual help doesn't come from reading the Library of Congress' collection on religious practices. Our salvation doesn't come from a perpetual quest for ecstatic, out-of-body spiritual novelties. Our deepest, truest hunger and thirst for God are answered in Jesus. We are taught that in Jesus, we see God, the Father at work. We are taught that in Jesus, we see God, the Holy Spirit gathering, leading and reconciling people everywhere, across time and space.

This is my beloved son, the one I have chosen to make these things possible, the one I have sent to humanity for all of you to receive.

Listen to him. Read his words, written, until you know them as your own.

Listen to him. Pay attention to his voice when you pray.

Listen to him. Receive his wisdom through the order of the natural world he helped to bring into being.

Listen to him. Trust his voice of forgiveness and freedom to cancel out the voices of blame and condemnation.

On Friday, Leslie and I opened our hearts to the Oakwood University Choir, 140 exquisite black singers, from Huntsville, Alabama, as they sang to 1,000 of us squashed into a Kansas City cathedral. They sang, with glorious harmonies, the old Horation Spafford hymn, "It is well with my soul."

"My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul"

Trust his promise of care to displace your fears that you are not deserving of this mercy.

Listen to him. Trust his direction in self-discipline over your voices of self-indulgence.

Listen to him. Trust his voice as the authoritative one among all the others who clamor for your attention, your loyalty, and the investment of your gifts.

Listen to him, and hear the sure voice of God's love, grace, and favor.

Thank you, God, for speaking to us in Jesus. Please, give us attentive ears to hear everything that you want to tell us through him. Amen.