

Transfiguration Sunday February 23 2020

Exodus 24:12-18, Matthew 17:1-9

Let's set the stage for our reading from Matthew. Especially since we've jumped ahead in the narrative from Jesus Sermon on the Mount last week (chapter 5) to today- chapter 17.

Just prior to our reading, as they were walking through Caesarea Philippi (north of the Sea of Galilee) Jesus asks who people say that the Son of Man is. The disciples respond- Some say John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Who do you say that I am? Jesus asks.

Peter responds that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus praises Peter for this revelation, which Jesus says is inspired by God . Then Jesus says- Messiah, means I must suffer at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, die, and be raised. Peter takes him aside and says- God forbid! This must never happen to you. Jesus says- Get behind me Satan- you are trying to trip me up. Your mind is set on human things, not divine things.

Jesus then says to all his disciples- Want to follow me? Deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow me. You want life? You gotta be willing to lose it. And you will be repaid, he says, in the time to come. Then he promises, some who are standing here will not taste death until they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

All of this happened 6 days ago, we are told (significant? Sinai Revelation? Ex 24:16- Moses sits in the cloud for 6 days and on the 7th God calls out of the cloud?) Feast of tabernacles (6 days after Day of Atonement). All of them.

After letting all this sit for 6 days- they go up the mountain with Jesus. Going up the mountain is where theophanies happen- encounters with God.

And they get what they expected. Jesus- transfigured in glory. Jesus speaking to Moses and Elijah- the Law and the Prophets. Jesus literally and symbolically in dialogue with the Hebrew Scriptures (You have heard it said- I say to you). I have come not to abolish, but to complete. (5:17) The law and the prophets is to do to others as you would have them do to you (7:12) Love of God and love of neighbor is what the Law and Prophets hang on (22:40). One commentator wonders, Is this moment the kingdom that Jesus promised some of the disciples would see before they died? The Son of Man in conversation with the Law and the Prophets?

Peter speaks to Jesus- Let's honor the three of you- Law, Prophets, Messiah. Each with a tabernacle, a tent- Recalling for Jewish people the place where the Ark of the Covenant – holding the Ten Commandments- were kept in their wandering after escaping Egypt. The tabernacle where the very presence of God resided. Because this is what you do when you encounter God. You mark that place in your life with a physical reminder of what you experienced.

At this very moment the cloud overshadows (See Exodus) and the voice from the cloud says to all of them- This is my Son, the beloved. I'm pleased with him. Listen to him!

Listen to him. Part of me wonders. Is God speaking to Elijah and Moses as well? Is God saying to the embodiment of the Hebrew Scriptures- listen to Jesus. Listen to how he interprets you. Listen to his understanding of what you mean. That even scripture bends to or is seen through the Jesus' words?

Listen to him, the voice says.

And immediately the disciples on hearing the voice fall to the ground afeared. The implication is they are lying face down- like Moses on his encounter with the burning bush. It's interesting to note. Seeing Jesus transfigured- doesn't seem to phase them. Seeing Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus- doesn't seem to phase them.

The voice or is it what is said- scares the piss out of them. Drops them to the ground. Listen to him- boom.

Then, Jesus came and touched them, it reminds me of my mom coming in to wake me up as a kid- gentle hand on the back. Get up, Jesus says. Awaken- arise. It's the same language used by Matthew for the resurrection of the dead. The same language used to tell Joseph to get up and go to Egypt, then go back home. Get up, Jesus says, and do not be afraid.

They look up and see – just Jesus. The one they have been walking with for so long. The one who now will go back down the mountain with them. Back down to these imperfect people. Back down to continue to journey to Jerusalem and his death.

Peter and the disciples know who Jesus is- he's the Messiah! But they don't know what that means. For them, Messiah means a great warrior, prince, ruler who will lead the Jews to rise up against the Roman occupiers and restore them as an independent state and a shining beacon on the hill to all nations of what it means to be faithful to God.

Peter won't listen when Jesus tries to tell him- No, no! Messiah means being betrayed into the hands of those who think they know what the Law and the Prophets mean. It means being killed for proclaiming God's true desire. It means being raised from the dead three days later.

In fact, Peter rejects that understanding- God forbid!

On this mountain- Peter and the disciples see and hear affirmation of who Jesus is- Son of the living God! The exalted one! Yes!

But they are also told the key to understanding what this really means- "Listen to him."

How are we like Peter? We are here because we proclaim that Jesus is Messiah. Is the Son of God. But do we carry with us a full understanding of what that means? For us. For our lives.

Do we really get what implications that has? Have we gotten so lost in the "myth" of Jesus- in the certainty that we know the story- that we miss the point? So often I hear folks who are believers say that all Jesus wants is for us to be nice to people? How does that jive with Jesus saying to the disciples, you want to follow me? Be prepared to lose your life. Love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you. That goes beyond just being, nice.

How are we like Peter? He is truly wanting to honor God- but does so in the wrong way. Trying to keep that mountain top experience of God and assuming this is the only true encounter of the divine. Up there. Shining white glory! Forgetting, that Jesus was with them in the valley before and he will be going with

them again. Are we looking for God on the mountaintops so hard we forget that God is present here in the everyday of life as well?

We are like Peter- imperfect means through which God can work. Ones that get caught up in thinking about human things and not hearing Jesus when he talks about the divine. But, like Peter, we have a saving grace.

Listen to him. Listen to Jesus.

How do we listen to Jesus? The one who we call God's Word to us.

As Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we point to scripture. What Martin Luther called the cradle of Christ. Here, in these pages. In these God breathed stories of God's pursuit of God's people- we find Jesus. The embodiment of the good news of God's self-sacrificing love for us. So, listening to him is to spend time reading, reflecting, talking about and understanding what these words might mean for us today. In 2020, in the United States, in Ely, and Solon, and Mt. Vernon, and Swisher, and Shueyville, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

How do we listen to Jesus?

We also point to the Word that is spoken by the faithful. The proclamation we have about who Jesus is and what he taught. That comes (I pray) from this pulpit, but also from the songs and hymns that we sing. The prayers that we pray. The life that we practice together on Sunday morning. One that has confession, forgiveness, generosity practiced and received, an experience of the abundance of God's provision and love for us in this Meal, and then the charge to go forth and share that good news to everyone.

How do we listen to Jesus?

We do so when we gather in study of scripture. Whether that is the Lenten Study of Diana Butler Bass' book *Grateful*- which is based in God's Word or in the Bible Study we will engage in between services starting today. Or in a group you assemble to read God's Word and reflect on what it might mean in our lives.

This is my Son. The beloved. Listen to him.

As we go into this Lenten season. Let us perhaps not give something up but add something instead. Maybe take 10 minutes a day to intentionally sit and listen to Jesus.

Whatever we do, however imperfectly we do it. We are Peter after all.

Remember this. Jesus is always with us. Up on the mountain and when we come back down. Always ready to come to us when we are afraid of what lies ahead, and when we are struck down by other things- feeling almost dead. Jesus is always the one who comes to us- reaches out and touches us with that gentle, loving hand and resurrects us. Get up. Arise! And who always gives us the good news- Do not be afraid. There is nothing to fear. For I am with you. In Jesus, God's rod and staff will truly protect and guide us. In Jesus- God is with us.

So, this Lent- let us shut out some of those other voices clamoring to be heard. And let us listen to Jesus.

Amen?