

## LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, THE TRANSFIGURATION, YEAR B, FEBRUARY 14, 2021

An older gentleman suspected his wife was getting hard of hearing. So he called her doctor to make an appointment to have her hearing checked. The doctor said there was a simple informal test that he could give his wife prior to the appointment which would help him determine the extent of her hearing problem.

The doctor suggested that he start out about 40 feet away from his wife, and in a normal conversational speaking tone, see if she hears him. If not, continually move 10 feet closer until he got a response." That evening his wife was in the kitchen, cooking dinner and he was in another room, about 40 feet away. In a normal tone he said, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. So, he moved 10 feet closer. "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. Then he moved another 10 feet closer. "Honey, what's for dinner?" Still no response. So he walked to the kitchen door, only a few feet away. "Honey, what's for supper?" But still, no response. As a last resort he walked up right behind her and said, "Honey, what's for dinner?" Finally she turned around and looked at him and he heard her say, "For crying out loud for the 5th time...chicken!"

Like most of us the older we get our hearing gets impaired. For others our ability to hear may not be impaired it's just that we simply don't listen. Isn't that the great phrase we use with our spouses, and our children, "You're not listening to me," when we get frustrated with them for not responding the way we want them to.

The gospel lesson this morning describes what is known as the transfiguration. What was the transfiguration? It was a confirmation of who Jesus was and what God ultimately would do in and through him. The story tells us that a blinding light engulfed Jesus that transfigured (changed) his appearance. In that experience, three of the disciples also had the opportunity to see Jesus talking with Moses and with Elijah. In that moment God was showing the disciples and us that Jesus represents the culmination of all God had done in the past through the law and the prophets and the beginning of all God would do in the future through Jesus.

But transfiguration involved more than seeing Jesus in a new way. There was a voice from heaven that said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; Listen to him." I don't think you can get more blunt about the emphasis of this story - the message is quite simple – listen. So the next question to ask ourselves are we listening? Maybe even more specifically are we listening at all? It is so easy today to be distracted by so many other voices competing for our attention. We are bombarded by so much data, messages, advertisements, sound bites, on cable or satellite channels, radio stations, that we have probably reached our threshold of what our ears can hear and our minds can absorb. Every waking moment of our lives seems to be filled with voices telling us what we should do, how to improve ourselves and what we should be pursuing.

We all know that a lot of the voices we hear are offering some great things especially the ones that tell us how to cope with life or a way from escaping the damaging rhetoric we hear. They're attractive offers and there's nothing wrong with most of them but they do compete and are often more simple and attractive than the message we hear from Jesus. Because let's face it the message from Jesus isn't simple and it isn't easy. So are we listening to that message at all?

But let's say we are listening so the next question is are we listening enough? Let's assume we are able to tune out the noise of the world from time to time to listen to Jesus. Are we doing that often enough to retain any of what we hear? Studies show that we forget 93% of what we hear within 7 days after hearing it. For those of us who are getting older we have to face the fact that our short term memory is failing faster than our long term memory. We can remember all the words to a Beatles song but we can't remember what we have gone into the next room to get. If we are going to retain Jesus' message to us, we are going to have to listen to it a little more often. So it's a good thing we have worship once a week and the opportunity to hear Jesus' word proclaimed once a week. It takes that level of input to keep our mental computers programmed to retain what we have heard.

A third question to ask ourselves, and perhaps the most important question, is are we listening with an open mind and heart? We are all guilty of selective listening. A lot of what Jesus talks about makes us uncomfortable because it isn't easy. We are confronted with what Jesus says about the problem of infatuation with the things of the world and about giving up those things. We all know that we enjoy material things so what is the balance of too much and being responsible and using what we have for the greater good. No matter what you think we are all prejudiced and Jesus' insistence that we be accepting and inclusive challenges us to open our hearts and minds to people who are different through ethnicity, gender, socio economic status and even from the way we are in viewpoint and behavior. We are oftentimes bothered by what Jesus has to say about God's preference for the poor and our responsibility toward them.

But mostly I think we don't always listen with an open mind and heart because it's about us being set in our ways. We've made up our minds about a lot of things and have our hearts set. So we don't really want to change our ways of thinking or our ways of feeling. We're just fine where we are intellectually and emotionally. We like the status quo. Many of us live by the motto, "Life's been good so far so why mess with it? I don't need to know anything more, thank you very much. It's like the book 'All I need to know, I learned in Kindergarten'" and we don't challenge ourselves to explore and expand some basic beliefs beyond what we learned early on in life. That's why it's so important, especially when it comes to scripture, to look at every aspect of the story and beyond what we learned as a child. We have to look at the entire context because we have a tendency to listen to only what we want to hear Jesus is saying to us especially when we want his words to fit our prejudices. So do we really listen to Jesus with an open mind and an open heart and a willingness to do things differently? Probably not as much as we should?

We just have to look at history and our world today to see how people have taken snippets of scripture to exclude, harm, and even kill others in the name of Christ. The plea in today's story stands out as a command – listen to him! So, I ask the question, if we were to just listen to Jesus, what is the one main message we hear him say?

Well, I don't think that it takes a biblical scholar to get that Jesus' message to us is a message of love. God's love for us is the constant that we find throughout the Bible. God's love is what we struggle with because we just don't get it that God's love is inclusive because God's love for us is pure grace.

When Jesus was approached by the young lawyer who asked of him "Rabbi, what is the greatest commandment?" how does Jesus reply? He said "You are to love the Lord

your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Love God. Love Neighbor. Everything is based upon this. All of our relationships. All of our encounters with one another are based upon these two commandments: Love God. Love Neighbor. It seems so simple when we hear it, but living it is anything but simple.

I know a church whose outside sign read "God loves you and we're trying." The truth in the sign tells us it's hard to love others, especially if they are so dog gone determined to make it hard to love them.

The Beatles had a song that said, "All you need is love, love is all you need." Well, on the surface, their message is not quite complete. Because we need more than love. We need Christ. We need Christ because we cannot do it on our own. We cannot love others without the love of Christ living within us.

With Christ, through Christ and in Christ we have all we need when we actively live our lives in a way that shows our love of God and our love of neighbor. To do that, we need to allow the light of Christ to shine in us and through us.

This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him! After nearly 2000 years, don't you think that maybe it's time that we started? Amen