

The story of Jesus' transfiguration provides us with one of those rare glimpses of an event that is too wonderful for us to comprehend. Like stories of Moses and the burning bush, Jacob and the ladder full of angels, or Elijah ascending into heaven on a chariot of fire, today's story doesn't fit into any of our "normal" categories. This is a scene that seems to fit well as one of the Bible's "X-Files," (for those who may recall that long-running sci-fi drama).

After witnessing such an incredible scene, we may not be too surprised to learn that the disciples, "kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen." But that line still causes me to wonder, 'Did they keep silent because they were terrified of what they had just witnessed?' That likely played a part. But even more likely is they kept silent in those days because they really didn't understand it. When God cracks open a door between this world and some other, brighter place where God is not at all like an absentee landlord but a very palpable presence, any words we may use to try to explain the experience end up sounding pretty worthless.

But if the disciples can't talk about it, then I wonder, 'What good was it?' And I've got another question, 'Why only three? Why is it that only Peter, James, and John go up the mountain with Jesus to pray?' Is it because Jesus wanted just a few disciples to receive special privileges, elite status, just to see how the others would respond? Or is it that they had somehow earned it by being better than all the others or because they had won some contest among the disciples? No, it would seem that Jesus took with him these three disciples not for privilege but for purpose.

These three, Peter James, and John come away from this experience not so much with a great story to tell but with an even greater passion for following Jesus as their Lord. Having greater passion for following Jesus as our living Lord is what God wishes for each of us. I believe God's desire is that our mountaintop experiences become not simply another, "Wow! I can't wait to get home and tell everybody how much they missed out on" happening. Nor are they merely meant to leave us yearning for that next "Rocky Mountain High" as though everything in between is just filler material. No, in truth, Jesus doesn't ever take these or any other disciples up on a mountaintop again. So

it would seem that this mountaintop experience was not meant for these few to have another feather in their caps but for them to learn and grow from. One of the keys to unlock this story is to look at what God says from the cloud that came and overshadowed them. The voice says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Now why might God say “listen to him!”? After all, God could have said, “Do something for him!” Or “Build something for him!” or “Give something to him!” Had God said one of those however, those would be too easy. Doing something or building something for God, like Peter, who wants to build three very nice dwellings up there, that we could do. Or, if God had said, “Give something to him.” That again is something we’re fairly used to doing and are pretty good at. Yet, as much as we might wish God had said something other than “listen to him,” the command is what it is. And that forces us to go much deeper. For those of us who are perpetual doers, who work to add value and meaning to our lives by what we accomplish, this comes as a hard message.

Most all of us can too easily lose perspective and forget that there is a time to work and a time to listen. A short while after this mountaintop epiphany, Gospel writer Luke tells the story of Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha. Most of you probably know the story. Jesus drops in for dinner, sits down for a cup of coffee and begins to talk. And, as we know, Mary sits down to listen while Martha feels she is left to do everything to get dinner ready by herself. When Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary she has to do her share of the work, Jesus tells Martha to sit down for a while herself. Luke tells us that Martha was “distracted by many things” (10:41). Her work had become a distraction and she wasn’t serving with a happy heart. Martha had become a slave to the urgent, but in so doing was missing the most important thing — the chance to listen to Jesus.

Oh, how easily we can fall into that same trap! Before this pandemic hit, my (or our) excuses for not taking time to listen may have sounded like this, ‘Dear God, I have so much to do today, sorry but I gotta run. Hey God, have you happened to notice how full my appointment book has gotten lately? Have you seen the work load (or amount of homework) I’m trying to keep up with? I’ve got this “things to do” list that just keeps growing. I’d love to stop and chat but I can’t seem to find the time.’ Yet now, when so

much of our usual social activity has been limited, I wonder, have we taken advantage of this opportunity to slow down or have we just found a new set of excuses?

Well, in any case, today's story instructs us to "Listen up, all you doers! Listen all you Peters who would busy yourselves building monuments, you Marthas distracted with serving (in all the myriad forms that takes). Sometimes the most important thing to do can be — nothing. Sometimes we need to put aside our busyness and simply listen. Listen to the Word of God in the Bible. Listen to the voice of God as it speaks to you in and through the doing of your days. Listen to the wind, the birds, the majesty of Bach, the laughter of children, and the frustration and pain of those who are hurting. Listen to your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends... maybe even try to listen to your pastor, a teacher, or a mentor. Listen to the years rushing by and the moans of pain from around the world. Listen to the voice of God in your life. This is more than simply, "Stop and smell the roses." It is, "Stop and listen to the voice."

Perhaps God has something to tell you but you've been too distracted to take the time to listen. What might God's word to you be? Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. He was snapping at his wife and children, choking down his food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated every time there was an unexpected interruption in his day. He recalls in his book *Stress Fractures* that before long, things around their home started reflecting the pattern of his hurry-up life style. He said the situation was becoming unbearable. Finally God provided an epiphany.

After supper one evening his younger daughter, Colleen wanted to tell him something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, "Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast."

Suddenly realizing her frustration, Swindoll answered, "Honey, you can tell me — and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly." He has never forgotten her answer, "Then listen slowly."

God's voice says to Peter, James, and John, "This is my Son, listen to him! Slow down. Don't be so quick to move things your way, to shape the world as you see it Peter.

Don't be so quick to scramble up the ladder, John. Don't try to beat your colleagues to the first position James. Slow down. My Son is trying to show you another way, another world, another kingdom. If you will just listen slowly.”

In today's story we are invited up the mountain with Peter, James, and John to hear God's voice. For those of us who are hurting or disturbed in mind or spirit, I believe God's word will come to you as a word of comfort. To those who are comfortable, God's word will likely come as a word to disturb you, to unsettle you. Do you happen to know these words from Isaiah 55?

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” We are privileged to have a God that cares so deeply for each of us that God speaks to us according to our needs. But this privilege is not just for the sake of having privileged children. God's word comes to us not for privilege but for a purpose — that we might have greater passion for following Jesus.

As we draw the curtain closed on the glorious themes of Epiphany, and prepare for the beginning of the next act in the divine drama, the season of Lent, we are to leave with God's words ringing in our ears, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” What we hear in the coming weeks may not always be cheerful. We're likely to hear more than we might like about suffering and death before we hear the voice of the angel at the empty tomb announcing the great and wonderful good news of Jesus' resurrection.

May we use this season of Lent to set aside and turn off some of our distractions and listen for what God wants us to hear. It is in the hearing of that good news that we will have a beacon to lead us to the doing of those things which are pleasing in God's sight. Amen

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Luke 9:28-45

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