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“Listen Up!” **Sermon on Mark 9:2-9**

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Transfiguration of the Lord

Mark 9:2-9

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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

Well, you don't have to yell! Sometimes, yelling is the only way you get people to listen. My father had a mastoid operation when he was young, that left him deaf in one ear and in the other ear, not much. What that meant was our television was cranked up to such a degree, that our neighbors had an extra flock of birds in their yards.

But, in order for my father to get the message, every pet, every appliance, every person had to yell.

Communicating through a yell, is well, difficult. Try yelling, "I love you!" to someone who's three feet from you. The yell is reserved to save a life, "Watch out!" The yell is reserved for the burning of the finger, "Ow!" The yell is reserved for anger, "I told you to take the garbage out!" The body knows this, and so yelling "I love you!" just lacks a certain something.

But one has to yell sometimes to get one's message across. To get people to stop, and remove from their lives what they were doing, and replace it with something new. Our text today seems like God is yelling. And to replace the old with what God wants us to do seems darn near impossible!

I feel for God. God has a difficult time getting the message across to us. When I read the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving at the table, it often reads to me like a recitation of our inability to hear. God said in the garden to do this, and we didn't do it. God said, "Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one, And you are to love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might..." And we didn't hear. God sent Prophets, and we didn't listen. Finally, God sent his son, and even then we chose to listen to our own voice. It's in the prayer!

We listen to our voice. To get people to stop and remove from their lives what they were doing, and replace it with something that God wants - wow! That is what Mark's Gospel is trying to do - communicating over and over again to people who cannot hear. Mark wants us to know this - that Jesus Christ is the Son of God! "Listen to him." It's not a once-in-a-lifetime "listen to him." Some people think of that as a once-in-a-lifetime thing. "I heard Jesus' voice back in 1973, and that's when I was saved." Since I've been saved, I've got my boat, got my car, barns are full. "Listen to him!" It isn't a once-in-a-lifetime act! When God said it in the Greek many years ago, God used the Greek "present imperative active," which is the same tense that my doctor used with me when he told me, "Eat less." I told my doctor, "I did." He said, "Not just once. No, I'm using the present imperative active. Eat less forever and ever. Amen." And How am I doing? It's hard! "Listen to him!"

The disciples in this gospel, and only in Mark's Gospel, they don't listen to him. They never listen. Jesus says he's heading to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and they argue about who's going to sit on his right side and who's on the left when Jesus gets to the seat of power. Listen to him!

When a crowd of 5,000 people appears and are hungry, the disciples say, "Send them home, Teacher!" Jesus says, "Give them something to eat!" "What are we going to do, rob a bank? How are these people going to eat?" Jesus sighs and breaks some bread and a little fish and has a communion service. And suddenly, 5,000 people are fed. You think you'd remember that, don't you? And a few paragraphs later, it's a crowd of 4,000 and the disciples say the same thing. "What are we going to do?" Jesus rolls his eyes, takes some bread, and again feeds the people.

And right after that, the disciples get into a boat, and they're grouchy, and Jesus says, "What are you squabbling about?" "Well, we're hungry, we don't have any bread!" They have a bread-making machine right in the boat. Listen to him!

Jesus asked his disciples, "What have you been hearing from folks out there about me?" His disciples said, "Well, people are saying you're John the Baptist, some say Elijah, others say one of the prophets." Jesus says, "But who do you say I am?"

And Peter said, "I know who you are. You are the Messiah." You're right! But when Jesus said he had to be handed over, suffer, and die, Peter raised his voice and said, "No, Lord! I forbid it."

And Jesus raised his voice, "Get behind me, Satan!" To get people to stop, and remove from their life what they were doing, and replace it with something that God wants, it's darn near impossible!

But it sounds to me, loud and clear, that the prayer of God to his favorite disciples - Peter, James, John, you, and me - for we have all made it up that mountain, is "Get this! This is my son, my beloved. Listen to him!" Forever and ever! Amen."

What that means is that we're going to have to remove other voices that we're listening to and replace them with Jesus.

Who told you that it was perfectly okay to put someone else down to make yourself feel better? Who is telling you that? Stop it and replace that with "Listen to him!"

Who told you that you can treat some people as less because they're not from around here? Who told you? Name the voices. Because you didn't hear it from me. "Listen to him!"

Who told you that I was a nationalist God? That my love stops at a border? When and where did you hear that coming from me? For the Love of God, "Listen to him!"

Who told you to distribute love with an eye dropper? "Listen to him!"

Who told you that it's about whoever has the most toys wins?

Who told you it's all about who's running for Caesar?

Who told you it's about the stock market?

Who told you it's about playing it safe?

Who told you it's about arming yourselves to the teeth? Who told you?

What I want you to hear is his voice! Listen to him! It's God's prayer to his favorite disciples.

Listen to him. And you are. You have a vision for this congregation. You've told me that. And that vision may be articulated as simply as, "We're listening." Your vision came out of the pandemic. You were all tired of all the voices yelling and screaming! And you said, "Whew! We need some good news. We need to hear God's voice. In a world of chaos, we want a direction to go." And so, we're going to listen to you, God. We're going to hear your Word, and we're going to live out your Word. Forever, and ever, and ever and ever, amen!

In a world that has little desire for God, we are going to be the Love of God. Think about that. We live in a country where people don't think about God, don't know God, don't believe in God, and yet are lonely. You may be the voice of God, the first voice they ever hear. So, you better listen to him and get the tone, the intonation right. Listen to him.

In a world that makes divisions faster than a hot knife through butter, we are about the hard work of reconciliation because we listen to him. In a world that's filled with the artificial, we are about the real and transformative witness to the power of God. The survey says that people are lonely. Do you think we can transform this world just by showing up? In a world lost in the dark, we are shining the Good News.

Lent is starting up on Wednesday. A few weeks ago, I was in a meeting that was winding down, and Devin Childers said, "I don't want to head into another Lent and do something like 'give up chocolate.' What if we added some God to our lives?" I reminded Devin that we were in a church meeting, and he wanted to talk about God? What if repentance isn't feeling badly, what if it's about turning our lives to God? And giving the Good News of the Gospel? What if we don't give up but add some mission and ministry?

What if when God says, "Give them something to eat," we did?

What if when you ignore the stranger, God says, "Give them an ear," we did?

What if we took some time away from watching sports or the news, and added a little time for one of our partner agencies? Time for mission and ministry? Try to make a difference in this world?

What if we listened, and added a cross on our way to Jerusalem? And adding a cross means adding hope and joy and light and life.

You'll hear more about that in the days ahead! We're going to tell you in these forty days of Lent, it's all about mission and ministry.

You light. You reconcile. You love. You are that which shines. Listen to him, because God is saying, "I love you." You've heard that, right?

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