

*“How Many Times Do I Have to Tell You?”*  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Transfiguration Sunday, February 15, 2015  
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*Holy Scriptures: Mark 9: 2-9     2 Corinthians 3: 17-18*

**Mark 9: 2-9**

<sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup>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.

**2 Corinthians 3: 17-18**

<sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup>And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

## Sermon

**Jesus said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” --**  
Mark 4: 23

*<sup>2</sup> 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,  
<sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white,  
such as no one on earth could bleach them.  
<sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses,  
who were talking with Jesus.*

The disciples become caught up and swept away  
by the majesty and mystery of the moment.  
They are moved to the depth of their souls  
and recognize that they were on holy ground.  
Peter was so wrapped up in the moment, that he felt he had  
to say something.

“Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here;  
let us make three dwellings,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’  
He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.  
Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there  
came a voice,  
‘**This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!**’  
Suddenly when they looked around,  
they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.”

“Only Jesus”  
God said, “Listen to Him!”  
There is Elijah, the Prophet;

over there is Moses, the Deliverer;  
and right here beside you is Jesus, the Son.

Listen to Him.

The followers looked again for Elijah and Moses,  
but were left with only Jesus...only Jesus.

***“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”***

This moment of glory gives a glimpse of the divinity of Jesus,  
the glory of being God’s own.

This moment of glory sends us forward to anticipate his  
ascension

into the glory of heaven.

This moment of glory sends us back in time to recall His  
baptism,

when Jesus emerged dripping wet from the waters of  
the River Jordan.

That day the Heavens opened and a dove descended and the  
voice of God said,

*“This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*

God then sent, shoved, drove, pushed the glorified Jesus out  
into the wilderness

armed only with the Word of God

to wrestle with demons and temptations,

to gaze into the abyss and explore the  
shadow places.

Forty days and forty nights later Jesus came out the  
wilderness

armed now with both the Word and a growing  
confidence in the Word,

and then He walked, strode, arrived into the  
human community,

calling for people to follow him on the  
Way.

*“Come and see!”* said Jesus. *“Follow me and I will make you fishers of people!”*

He called to him Andrew and Simon Peter,  
then He invited James and John,  
then more and more chose to follow Jesus on  
the Way,  
more folks and followers of Jesus  
than we could name here in a  
lifetime of testimonials,  
every single one both a saint and sinner  
who stepped in, stepped up,  
stepped out, stepped forward.

Yet not one of these souls had witnessed the baptism of  
Jesus.

So, when Jesus retreated with Peter and James and John  
to a lonely mountaintop to pray,  
once again God spoke to the followers.

“Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there  
came a voice,

**‘This is my Son, the Beloved;  
listen to him!’”**

Is God still speaking, still commanding, still insisting that we  
listen to Jesus?

What do you think, does God need to say this to us as well?

Ever wonder if God ponders how many times we need to be  
told the same lesson?

God spoke to the witnesses at the baptism of Jesus.  
God spoke to the witnesses at the transfiguration of Jesus.

God is still speaking to the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

That means us.

We are the living witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

We're the bearers of Good News, called and empowered by the grace of God.

The difference is

the witnesses at the River Jordan and on the mountaintop

were on their own.

We have no such excuse!

We have the Body of Christ, the Church, the Community of Faith, the Way,

to be our support network and our foundation  
built on the solid rock of God's love.

***“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”***

There is a marked difference between seeing the transfiguration

– seeing the dazzling white, seeing the clouds,  
seeing the images of Elijah and Moses,  
seeing that only Jesus is left –  
and listening to Jesus and  
following Him on the Way.

“The disciples, in common with many Christians throughout the church's life,

want to have the glory that they can see without the message they must hear...

...the two cannot be separated.” [\[1\]](#)

One Sunday morning in 1967, just a handful of miles from here,

Dr. King preached on the combination of glory and suffering.  
He said to the followers of Jesus and to any who would listen,

*“My Bible tells me that Good Friday comes before Easter.  
For the Crown we wear, there is the Cross we must bear.  
Let us bear it--bear it for truth, bear it for justice, and bear it for peace.  
Bear it for truth,  
for truth pressed to earth will rise again.  
Bear it for justice,  
for the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.  
Bear it. Bear it for peace,  
for ‘you shall reap what you sow.’” [2]*

As Jesus said, *“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”*

Look and listen for the glory and the suffering in our midst today.

Imagine that as you listen to neighbors in need  
you are, in fact, listening to Jesus’ people.

Listen for God’s people who offer love, share laughter and lift up cries for mercy.

*“The greatest object in the universe  
is a good person struggling with adversity,” wrote Oliver Goldsmith.*

*“Yet there is still a greater one,  
and that is the good person that comes to relieve it.”*

Are you called by Christ to be a helper, a listener, a change

agent,  
to help relieve another person's adversity,  
to be the calm in the whirlwinds of another  
soul's life?

***“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”***

To paraphrase the post on a friend's FaceBook page, she  
posted:

*“Don't just go to church; be the church!”* Amen!

My home congregation liked to say  
that we didn't “go to church” as much as “have  
church,”

which is the difference  
between observing Jesus' faith walk  
from a critical distance  
and choosing instead to be connected,  
to become engaged, tuned in and  
listening,  
singing, praying, serving,  
studying,  
living fully in the context  
of today,  
allowing the  
experience of being God's  
own  
to move in  
and through you.

Some neighbors enrolled in a workshop on public speaking.  
When they entered the classroom  
they discovered that the course instructor was blind.  
He listened closely to what each student had to say,  
how it was expressed, the tone and tenor of their  
proclamation,

and then offered constructive feedback.  
Pretty soon the students determined  
that the lessons they gleaned in the workshop  
were far greater than anticipated.  
They'd signed up for lessons on how to speak in public;  
what they learned was how to listen.  
When you listen,  
when you truly listen with your whole being,  
you start by caring, by tuning in,  
by wanting to know and understand  
what another soul needs to  
communicate.

Teachers have something to offer;  
they start by being fine listeners.  
Statesmen and women have a direction and a destination;  
they start by listening to their constituents.  
People of faith have an aptitude for servant leadership;  
they start by listening to God and the whole people of  
God.

*“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile,  
a kind word,  
a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of  
caring,  
all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”* -- Leo  
Buscaglia

***“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”***

Be open to the wonder of the moment.  
Jesus and his followers went up the mountain  
and then down the mountain the same way,  
one careful step at a time.  
Only when they paused at the mountaintop for prayer and  
reflection

and were open to the flow of the Spirit did they have a revelation,

heard God's affirmation, receive divine instruction,

and then went forth with conviction.

The difference was when they removed their veils

did they see the holy in Jesus and in each other.

Lift up your veils and whatever covers or clouds your vision,

see the world and one another with clear eyes and a joyful heart.

Dare to remove your mask and let the world see your glory.

You might be surprised to discover that when you do, you can see others' glory as well.

See the glory and see the suffering.

See where God is directing you, and when you get there, listen.

No one ever said being a follower of Jesus would be easy.

Sometimes our transfiguring moments are in the midst of tragedy, of death, of loss.

Sometimes we are transformed when we come face-to-face with the abyss;

when we peer into the shadows, sometimes with fear and trembling.

We meet God when we look into the heart of our soul,

when we consider our destiny,

when we grasp the beauty and the brevity of life on earth.

Such a struggle can be cosmic, transformative, breathtaking.

*"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away." – Hilary Cooper*

***"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"***

Last weekend our congregation sent seven members ranging from age 11 to 55

to the Georgia Regional Youth Assembly.

We drove south and east for 5 hours to St. Simon's Island and gathered with around 270 followers of Jesus.

The majority of the gathered faithful were between 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

I spent more time with the seventy junior high school youth, mostly because I remember well what a mess I was at that time in my life and can relate.

Rev. Kyle Brown, the keynote speaker for the junior high youth,

is a Disciples of Christ minister from Kentucky.

He told some stories from his life,

how he met his wife Rev. Sarah Renfro, what he did for fun and for God.

Then he had us get in small groups of ten with an assignment:

discuss and decide on one question to ask him.

My young people wanted to know what his best friend's name was,

and whether they got in trouble.

When everyone reassembled,

the keynoter received each small group's questions one at a time

and answered them aloud.

"Now," he said, "go back into your small groups.

Each person tell one story about yourself, if so inclined."

To be honest, I did not know if these youth would feel comfortable sharing

since they had only just met

and real trust had not been established.  
So very gently I asked if anyone had a story to share.  
The first two teens who spoke up shared fairly basic tales.

Then I told about the time my best friend Jeffery and I  
climbed a fence  
and landed in a stranger's backyard that we thought  
was empty,

only to have the homeowner emerge and sic a  
large dog after us.  
I said that in my home city it seemed as if every dog was  
named either King or Killer,

and that this dog was most likely called Killer.  
Jeffery hastily jumped back over the fence.  
In my panic and fear I couldn't get a decent foothold.  
I could see over the top of the fence my buddy escaping,  
but when I called for help Jeffery turned right around  
and ran back to pull me over just in time.

The youth in the small group said that reminded them of the  
movie "Sandlot."

I told them that the next summer when we hit a baseball into  
that same yard  
we decided to go get another baseball.

Then a girl shared in a small, still voice a story  
of what it feels like to her to have a grandmother  
become ill.

And then the girl sitting next to her  
told how much she missed her dog who passed away  
last year.

And a boy spoke about his hopes and anxieties around trying  
out for a school team.

All the while you could hear a pin drop  
as our teens listened and shared, encouraged and  
cared.

One story after another spilled out,  
filling the air and sustaining souls.

My friends, when we have conversations that matter,  
when we pause long enough to listen to Jesus and His  
people,

when we relish shared humor  
and respond to suffering with  
compassion,

suddenly veils are lifted,  
eyes and ears and hearts  
are opened,

community is  
fostered,

and a cosmic  
voice from heaven

says,

*“These are my beloved,  
followers of my Son,  
with whom I am well pleased!  
Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”*

All power be to the Creator, the Son and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen.

#### EXTRA MATERIAL:

Epiphany culminates today and sets the stage for the Season  
of Lent.

The Transfiguration is our spiritual prelude to the Passion of

the Spirit.

This story of Christ and his disciples' mountaintop experience

is so memorable it is told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter.

*(Mt 17.1–8; Lk 9.28–36; 2 Pet 1.16–18)*

The light of God's love shone on Jesus' face and through him to us.

From that time he turned his face toward Jerusalem and the cross.

Listen is an active verb.

Our favorite Stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote, *“We have two ears and one mouth so we may listen more and talk the less.”*

Or as talk show host Larry King once shared, *“I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening.”*

What you need to know will be made clear to you through Jesus – so listen to Him!

[1] Texts for Preaching, Year B, Rrueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, Knox Press. Page 181.

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr., Sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta GA on April 30, 1967. Adapted.