



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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FEBRUARY 7, 2016
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Listen to Him!

II Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43a

I debated last week whether or not to read today's lesson in its entirety. This passage from the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Luke actually consists of two stories—or does it? You be the judge.

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus

rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Luke 9:28-43

Starting with the second story, the one with which I can more easily identify, I doubt the father and his son could have cared less about what had just happened up on Mount Tabor. The last thing on their minds was a group of guys camping out in the woods, singing “Kum Bah Ya,” and having mountaintop experience. The father wanted someone to save his boy from the demons that tossed him to the ground and marked him as a reject from society. The son just wanted to have a normal life like all the other kids and be accepted. The crowd wanted to see if these disciples of the so-called Messiah could perform a miracle and get rid of the demons. So far, the demons were winning.

Today we know that this young fellow probably suffered from epilepsy, a group of disorders that often causes seizures. Today, instead of ordering the demons to leave the boy, a variety of medications are available to help him lead a regular life. In the first century, however, the boy was considered to be demon-possessed, not a malady for polite company. Not only was the boy at risk from injury because of his condition, he was ostracized from the community and considered a threat to everyone else. The father begged the disciples who did not go up the mountain to help his son, but their efforts failed. They had seen Jesus heal people many times. He would say a few words, touch them, and they were back to health. Was it their lack of faith? Did they not have the correct incantation? Or were they trying to get rid of something that was not there? It was a long way from the bottom of the mountain up to the top.

Meanwhile, things at the top of the mountain got rather interesting. Perhaps because of their long hike to the top or trying to keep up with Jesus as he moved from village to village or simply because it was time to rest, Peter, James and John were exhausted. While Jesus went apart to pray, they were nodding off, a practice they would soon repeat on the night Jesus would be arrested.

They never got their nap, however, for Jesus’ face began to glow and his clothes began to sparkle. Moses and Elijah, the giver of the law and the great prophet, suddenly appeared with Jesus and talked about what would happen when he reached Jerusalem. Not knowing what to say, Peter blurted out that it would be a good idea to build booths for the three men and stay on

the mountain. Suddenly a cloud swirled around them, hiding them from sight, and a voice spoke, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" The cloud lifted. Moses and Elijah were gone. The four men were alone again. No one spoke about what had happened.

Peter, James, and John were not at all concerned about what might be going on down below. Who would be? They had just experienced a spiritual moment that few people could ever imagine. They had seen Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah! What could be better? The giver of the law, the prophet, and the Messiah all together! To top it all off, God had spoken and they had heard his voice. It was a spiritual high such as would never be experienced again! Why not stay up there and savor the moment?!

It would appear that there is no connection between these two stories. On the mountain, four men are enjoying a spiritual retreat. Down below, a community is struggling with the problems that make life hard. The two experiences are miles apart . . . except for those words from the cloud: "This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him!"

Oddly, however, there is no indication Jesus said anything else of significance. The text tells us they all remained silent. Apparently Jesus said nothing on the mountain that his disciples felt was worthy of being repeated.

When they did come down the mountain, however, Jesus had plenty to say. He rebuked the demons and they listened! They released the boy and he was free at last. Jesus also rebuked the people and his disciples, calling them a "faithless and perverse generation," suggesting he was tired of having to deal with them.

Have you ever been rebuked? Of course you have. People have taken you to task for something you did or did not do. You have been reprimanded for your behavior or attitude. You have been criticized for decisions you made or for failing to act when you should have. Jesus rebuked the lot of them—because they had not listened.

Over and over, in a variety of ways, Jesus had taught the disciples and the people who came to hear him those very basic lessons: Love God with your entire personality, with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. When he invited fishermen to follow him, he promised they would be fishing for people. When he invited Levi, or Matthew as we know him, to join him, he was asked him to stop cheating his own people through his

methods of collecting taxes. When the Pharisees challenged him because he healed on the Sabbath or forgave sins or offered people second chances, Jesus challenged them to re-think their understanding of God's mercy. When he preached to large crowds of people, he promised that those who were poor or hungry or grieving or hated by their neighbors would see a reversal of roles. Things would change, he told them, because of the power of God's love for his people. But they were not listening. In this story, the only ones who listened to Jesus and took him seriously were the demons who immediately left the boy and gave him his freedom and right place in the community. They recognized his power. They understood who he really was.

You can't really tell one story without the other because the story on the mountain is about transformation and empowerment and so is the story in the valley. On the mountain, the law giver and the prophet appeared with Jesus, a community of God's presence among his people. Jesus was transformed as this trinity of God's personality coalesced in him. His journey to the cross and beyond to the garden of resurrection was set. Along the way, he would resurrect people from the various deaths they experienced from life.

At the foot of the mountain, the lives of the boy and his father were transformed because of the freedom Jesus gave them. A new community was formed as neighbors welcomed them again. New life began free from the oppressive illness that had diminished their lives.

The boy and his father remind us that there are people and situations all over the world suffering from debilitating conditions. Too often, the problems are overwhelming and we can do little more than wring our hands and bemoan our—or someone else's—fate. You name the problem—crime, poverty, disease, illiteracy, ignorance, bigotry, terrorism, hatred, injustice, oppression, whatever—and we will agree that it needs to be addressed. But we do not always know how. We don't know how to rebuke the demons. We do not understand the power God in Christ has given us.

Listen to him! Listen! What does Jesus tell us to do? Love God and love one another. Love yourself. Turn the other cheek. Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Visit the sick and imprisoned. Clothe the naked. Welcome the stranger. Strive for righteousness. Fight for justice. Celebrate when the prodigal returns home. Be glad that your brother is alive. Pray. Give alms. Rejoice.

Listen to him. What are the “demons” that cause such calamity in our world? What contributes to illness? What causes poverty? Why do people fight one another? Why are we angry? What separates us? How can families be reconciled? What needs to be rebuked as toxic to life as God intends it? The Christ who is empowered on the mountain is the same Son of God who empowers the possessed to be free, the sick to be well, the wounded to be whole, and all of us to be transformed into God’s daughters and sons. There is no need to stand around and wring our hands, fretting over what we cannot fix. We are called to move into the world and do the things Jesus has told us to do. Listen to him!

February 7, 2016

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We realize, O God, that there are times when our minds are veiled from your truth, either by our own lack of understanding or our unwillingness to seek the truth. We are grateful, therefore, for the gift of Jesus Christ for he brings enlightenment to us all. We praise you for the gift of scripture which tells the story of our faith and for faithful friends who are willing to walk with us this journey of discovery and obedience.

We pray for friends we know and for persons we have never seen who have urgent needs at this hour. We thank you for your presence in hospital rooms, funeral homes, employment lines, soup kitchens, war zones, and the lonely places which we sometimes wrap around ourselves. For all that you have already done for us, we are grateful. For everything you are doing to help us now, we thank you. For all that we need in the days to come, we seek your mercy.

We remember especially the people of Thailand who are still searching for loved ones and wondering how they will recover. Use the resources of the world to help them now and in the days ahead. Use our prayers to meet their needs and encourage them by the compassion directed to them from the world.

Speak to us, O God, in ways that we will hear. Communicate so that we will listen. Empower us to live into the calling you have for each of us and feed us once again the bread of life and the cup of salvation as we feast at your table. All these things we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.