



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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FEBRUARY 11, 2018  
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

It Is Good To Be Here!  
Psalm 50; Mark 9:2-9

I get Simon Peter! I think I know why he said what he did on that mountain after having seen Jesus with Moses and Elijah. I get why he wanted to build a few huts and hang out with those guys for a while. I also know that Peter was notorious for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. He was the poster child for the faux-pas or foot-in-mouth disease.

Just a week earlier, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus bared his soul about what was yet to come when his troop of followers arrived in Jerusalem. He would be challenged by the scribes and pharisees, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. Before the last syllable of those unthinkable words could settle into their ears, however, Peter popped off with, “No way, Jesus! Those things could never happen to you!” Jesus’ reply was not a sympathetic smile with a pat on the shoulder as he said, “Thanks, Peter, but yes, it will happen this way.” No, he sharply rebuked him saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” Ouch!

Weeks later, after their last supper together, Jesus again confessed to the apostles his deepest hurt that one of his closest friends would betray him. Once again Peter inserted himself into Jesus’ story and insisted that he would not be the one to betray his Lord. To which Jesus responded, “Oh, but you will, Peter, and not only once but three times!”

In between these events is this story of Jesus, Peter, James, and John on the mountain. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear and converse with Jesus. So intense is the holiness of this gathering that all three seem to glow with a radiant light. Lest this holy moment pass too quickly, Peter blurts out the suggestion that they build three dwellings on the mountain so that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah can be there together as long as they want. Jesus ignores Peter, but a voice speaks from the heavens saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.” Only then, as our first hymn suggests, does Peter keep silent.

Peter was rough around the edges. Life navigating the impetuous sea had taught him to react quickly to whatever happened, so it was no surprise that he was often the first of Jesus’ followers to speak his mind. More likely

than not, Peter was simply saying what the other disciples were thinking. If we are honest, most of us are happy to have a Simon Peter in the room who will say what we will not.

I'm with Peter. Sometimes you experience something that is paralyzingly beautiful or meaningful and you don't want to let go.

A few years ago on our sabbatical trip to Europe, we had only one day of exploring Budapest before flying to England. We took a quick bus tour to see the major sights in the city and disembarked on the Buda side of the city. Late in the day, we crossed the Danube River on the Chain Bridge and found the "Shoe Memorial" in front of the Parliament building on the edge of the river. The shoe memorial was created by artists who made bronze shoes of all types and sizes to remember the hundreds of Jews who were lined up on the bank of the river and shot by the Nazis so that they would fall into the river and float downstream. It was a haunting and disturbing reminder of how cruel we can be to one another.

Walking back to our hotel, we happened upon St. Stephens Basilica which we had wanted to see. Hoping to at least peak inside this great cathedral, we were delighted to discover that a double organ concert was just beginning. For an hour and a half, that holy space was filled with wonderful music. None of it could compare, however, to the final piece which was Widor's Toccata from Symphony No.5, an organist's delight, and a piece we have heard here many times. The young man at the console was located in the rear balcony so we could not see him from below, but we only needed to listen. What we heard was glorious! He not only played with great skill, he played with his heart. Like Peter, I thought, it would be good to set up camp and stay there all night to listen to that heavenly music. Four and a half years later I can still hear the notes reverberating in the cathedral and in my heart.

I'm with Peter. There are times when we have those "It is good to be here moments," and we don't want to lose them. I often have that feeling about this place, this sanctuary, and all of the people who come into this sacred space. It is good to be here!

It is good to be here because this sanctuary is a sacred place. Granted, it is not magical! We cannot come in here hoping to say just the right words or do the right things expecting God will grant us our wishes. Sacred spots do not work that way. Each week I walk into the chancel and sit down as Mark plays the prelude. I look around at you and then I look at this spot

between the pulpit and the altar. I have told you about it many times. When we replaced the flooring with slate a few years ago, I was pleased to see that the contours and shading of the tiles offered interesting images throughout the sanctuary. Right here beside the pulpit is a tile which to me looks like a fire. I am reminded of the story of Moses in the wilderness seeing a bush burning which was not consumed. Upon examining it, he hears the voice of God which tells him to remove his sandals for he is standing on holy ground. Each time I prepare for worship, I look at that tile and pray, “God, help us to remember that we are on holy ground.” This is a sacred place.

This sanctuary is sacred, not because of curious tiles, but because of the presence of God and the thousands of souls who have breathed their own prayers in this space. This sanctuary was dedicated to the glory of God, but we make it sacred because of what we do here. The saints of God gather week by week and sometimes during the week to worship and celebrate, to grieve and hope, to pray and look for strength to keep going. We are the saints of God—not because we are perfect. We are not. The saints of God are never perfect. We are all like Simon Peter, stumbling into faith by fits and starts, getting it right sometimes, getting it wrong a lot of times, but recognizing when God is in our midst and wanting to hold onto those times. Together, we make this place a sacred spot, holy ground.

It is good for us to be here because this is one place where we look and listen for God together. The late Marcus Borg once pointed out that the season of Epiphany, the Sundays in which we celebrate the ways in which God is revealed to us, this season which leads into the season of Lent, ends with the story of the Transfiguration. And in that story we hear the voice of God say, “This is my Son, my Beloved. Listen to him.” Borg noted that the Jewish faith has a term for this experience of hearing the voice of God. It is called *bat cole* which, translated, means “daughter of a sound.”<sup>1</sup> We know what a sound is, but what is the “daughter of a sound”? It is that voice of God that sounds like thunder to the average ear but what you might describe as the “still, small voice of God.” It might resemble the song of a bird, the laughter of a child, the cry of a broken heart, or the music of an organ. Rarely is this “daughter of a sound” audible to the ear, but you hear it in your soul.

Some of you have told me of instances when you have heard the voice of God, not with your ears, but with your heart. It was a voice of assurance,

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Marcus J. Borg “Listening for the Voice of God,” Lenten Noonday Preaching Series, Calvary Episcopal Church, Memphis, Tennessee (March 17, 2003); available online at: <http://explorefaith.org/homilies/Lent/LentenHomily03.17.03.html>.

a voice of comfort, a voice of prodding, a voice of wooing you to come back home.

It is good for us to be here in this place week by week so that together we can listen for God and look for God and discover where it is God wants to take us next.

Marcus Borg tells a story which bears repeating many times over:

It's a story about a three-year-old girl who was the only child in her family. But now her mom is pregnant, and this three-year-old girl is very excited about having a baby in the house. The day comes when the mother-to-be delivered, and the mom and dad go off to the hospital. A couple of days later they come home with a new baby brother. And the little girl is just delighted.

But after they've been home for a couple of hours, the little girl tells her parents that she wants to be with the baby in the baby's room, alone, with the door shut. She's absolutely insistent about the door being shut. It kind of gives her folks the willies, you know? They know she's a good little girl, but they've heard about sibling rivalry and all of this.

Then they remember that they've recently installed an intercom system in preparation for the arrival of the new baby, and they realize that they can let their little girl do this, and if they hear the slightest weird thing happening, they can be in there in a flash.

So they let their little girl go into the room. They close the door behind her. They race to the listening post. They hear her footsteps move across the room. They imagine her now standing over the baby's crib, and then they hear her say to her two-day-old baby brother, "Tell me about God. I've almost forgotten."<sup>2</sup>

It is good to be here because each one of us is like that little girl. We know about God. We've heard a lot about God. We have experienced God.

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<sup>2</sup>Borg.

We have even heard God whisper to us a time or two, but, over time, we forget. Like the distinct memories of a loved one which become blurry around the edges years after they have died, we sometimes forget what we once knew so clearly about God. That is why it is good to be here, to be together, to help one another remember and listen and discover that we are still standing on holy ground—not only in this sanctuary—but wherever our steps take us on this whirling ball of life God has created for us.

Simon Peter had seen Jesus glorified in the presence of the two great prophets of his faith. He did not want to lose that experience. Who wouldn't want to build a few shelters and savor the moment for a while? We gather in this place to rediscover God week by week. We come here to remember and to experience anew the presence of God.

Peter was right. It was good for them to be in that sacred space on the mountain. Then he heard the voice of God which simply reminded him and his friends to listen to Jesus who was telling them it was time to break camp and get back to work. It's a good thing Peter listened because he was able to experience a lot more sacred moments with Jesus as he followed him to Jerusalem. Had they stayed on the mountain, all he would have had was a memory of one amazing moment. Because he left the mountain with Jesus and his friends, he experienced many more holy moments.

It is good to be here in this sacred space. We need to be here. And other people need to be here with us. Perhaps we should remind them so. Let us remember that we, too, are urged to listen to Jesus who calls us to go about our daily routines, living the Gospel as best we know how. Listen for the voice of God, that "daughter of a sound," that still, small voice that we can hear only when we are silent. Let us go and test out the Gospel and then return to tell one another about God—lest we forget. It is good to be here! Amen.

February 11, 2018

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

While there are precious few hills in our city, we know that, unlike the imagined gods of ancient times, you are not limited by geography, O God. Wherever we are and wherever we go, we know that you watch over us so that we do not have to look very far for you. We are grateful for your nearness, O God. We appreciate the vigil you keep over us. We are thankful that you rush to our aid even before our cries for help pass our lips.

We know from experience that we are not immune from harm and the challenges that life brings our way. We do know that you watch over our coming and going and are always ready to take care of us.

For that reason, we offer our prayers today for our friends and for ourselves. Harm has come our way in the form of illness and accidents, recklessness and randomness, and the privilege of inhabiting these wonderfully fragile bodies that are ours. Make us aware that you are with us and that we are not alone in our work to be healthy. Continue to bless us with bright and well-trained medical personnel, with researchers whose gift is to explore the pathway to health, and with friends and family who offer healing for our souls.

Because we know you created our world and care about it, we pray for the earth and seek its healing. We confess that we have taken our home for granted and have exploited the resources you have so generously provided. Help us to rediscover our original calling, O God, which is to be good stewards of this garden of a world you have given to us. Guide us as we take care of this precious gift and hand it off to all who will follow us.

We know as well that while we are special in your sight, we are not your only children on this earth. We pray for people all over the globe who are truly our brothers and sisters. We pray for health and wholeness, for food and shelter and safety, for freedom and justice and peace. Inspire us to be good citizens of your world, O God, and good neighbors to one another.

We look to you, O God, because you are our true help. Gather us as a hen would gather her baby chicks and take care of us. Gather us and love us. Gather us and make us whole through Jesus Christ our brother and our Lord. Amen.