



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

FEBRUARY 15, 2015
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Who Would Talk Anyway? Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 9:2-10

Some things just go without saying. The late Jim Croce summed it up well when he sang:

You don't tug on Superman's cape.
You don't spit into the wind.
You don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger,
And you don't mess around with Jim.¹

There are simply some things that are common sense. For instance, I am not certain why Jesus felt that it was necessary to tell Peter, James, and John NOT to talk about what had happened on the mountain during their brief retreat there. What had happened was Jesus had suddenly been wrapped in a brilliant white light such as they had never seen before. The legendary prophets, Moses and Elijah, appeared and engaged Jesus in conversation. Then a cloud covered the mountain and a voice (which they perceived to be God's) admonished them, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And as quickly as it all had happened, it all went away. Now, if you and a couple of your friends had seen and heard such strange things, would you tell anybody? Who would talk about such odd things when likely no one would believe you anyway?

Nevertheless, Jesus told the three disciples not to talk about what had happened until he had been raised from the dead (another perplexing topic for the disciples).

Strange and unexplainable events were frequent in Jesus' life and it was many years before anyone wrote them down and began to share them with people who were not witnesses. At the beginning of his ministry, after he was baptized by his cousin John, Jesus had one of the strangest experiences of all.

¹Jim Croce, "You Don't Mess Around with Jim," *You Don't Mess Around with Jim*, ABC Records, 1972.

As we read earlier from Matthew's Gospel, following his baptism, Jesus was compelled to go into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tempted. I hope you find it as odd as I do that the first task God would put before Jesus was to endure the temptations of the Tempter himself. Those forty days became something of a "spiritual boot camp" during which time Jesus was tested at his most vulnerable points.

Throughout his sojourn in the desert, Jesus fasted, a common spiritual discipline then and now. Knowing that he would be famished, the Tempter appealed to his physical need and his psychological desires by suggesting that Jesus use his power to transform stones into bread, something the Son of God could surely do. It was an appealing temptation, not only because Jesus was hungry but because anyone would want to know if he could actually do it. Did Jesus have the power to convert rocks into food? Testing it out would have serious consequences. If he succeeded, Jesus might be further tempted to use his powers to meet other, personal desires. If he failed, however, he might question altogether what ability, if any, he had to effect change in the lives of the people he was sent to serve.

Jesus did not hesitate to remind the Tempter that while physical needs are important, spiritual needs are vital as well. Relying on a well-proven debate tactic, Jesus reached into his knowledge of scripture and stated that humans are not only physical creatures but spiritual beings as well. "One does not live by bread alone," he reminded the Tempter, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). We cannot forget or neglect our spiritual needs anymore than we can forget or neglect our physical needs. The spirit, as well as the body, must be fed.

Not one to be easily dismayed, the Tempter tried a different angle. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and suggested that he prove he was God's Son by leaping off. Using Jesus' own tactic against him, the Tempter also quoted scripture, reminding Jesus of the psalmist's declaration that God would not allow his chosen One to suffer harm. "He will command his angels concerning you," he whispered, "and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone'" (Matthew 4:6b). Again, refusing to be beguiled by the silver-tongued rascal, Jesus pointed out that it is not right to take advantage of God's concern for us. In other words, we are to love and respect God more than to waste God's time and energy proving something we already know to be true. Moreover, Jesus had come specifically to bear witness through his life that God is willing to suffer physical and spiritual anguish in order to prove to us how much he loves and cares for us. Under

no circumstance, however, should we take advantage of our relationship with God.

A third time, the Tempter appealed to that human side of Jesus that might be enamored with personal prosperity and glory. He took Jesus to a high mountain where all the kingdoms of earth could be seen and offered Jesus dominion over them in exchange for his commitment and worship. The Tempter failed to realize, however, that Jesus already reigned over all the earth—indeed over all that had been or ever would be created—but was not at all interested in temporal glory. Above all, he told his antagonist, our worship is reserved for God alone. No physical delights, no personal security, and no manner of authority and influence should ever persuade us to worship anyone or anything other than God. God deserves our worship and undivided loyalty and devotion.

While these two stories, separated by months or a couple of years, may appear to have nothing to do with one another, these two passages—the story of Jesus’ temptation and of the transfiguration—are important for us today. They bump into each other at the point of our upcoming Lenten journey. Jesus’ time in the wilderness is a template for our own season of soul searching over these next six weeks. It is a time when we focus upon those three pillars of our faith which Jesus affirmed in the wilderness: the importance of our spiritual well-being, the sanctity of our relationship with God, and the singular importance of our worship of God alone. These values frame everything else we do during Lent.

The other guideline for our journey together is the very one Jesus handed to Peter, James, and John on their way down the mountain to rejoin their ministry. Do not talk about what you have seen, he said, until I have risen from the dead. In other words, do not talk about what is revealed to you until you understand what it all means. Obviously, they did talk about what had happened among themselves as they sought to better understand it. And, presumably, after his resurrection, they shared the experience with others so that at a later date the Gospel writers recorded it so that any and everyone could learn about the things that happened on that mountain.

During Advent we focused on “Christmas Reflections,” the ways in which certain characters in the Christmas story thought about what Jesus’ birth meant and how our own lives reflect Jesus’ coming into the world. Lent offers us a companion opportunity of looking ahead, of searching for and becoming open to a vision of what God is calling us to do. For sixty years we

have faithfully served Christ on this corner. For sixty years we have hearkened to a vision that called for a new and unique ministry on the growing edges of our community. What now? Where is God calling us? Where is God leading us? Earlier this morning in Sunday School, we had a good discussion about what is next for us. What needs should we address and how can we share God's love in this community? We need to do what our founders did sixty years ago and boldly follow God's lead into the future. My hope for the Lenten season and beyond is for us to explore that vision, to open our eyes to see what God sees, to allow God to continue to be the vision for the community of Christ known as Lakeside.

For now, it is a conversation for us to have among ourselves. As Christ cautioned, we are not to talk about what we have seen until we fully understand it. We are to talk with one another, to share, to question, to dream, to struggle, to wonder, to challenge, and to look beyond anything we have done so far to grasp God's vision for us. Once we have done that, we can share it with others, with the world. But first we need to talk among ourselves.

Our Lenten journey is intended to be a starting point for this conversation. Like Jesus' entry into the wilderness, we step into unknown territory knowing that there will be temptations to feed our own appetites, to take advantage of God's generosity and goodness, and to follow visions other than what God offers us. We keep in mind, however, the excitement this journey can generate, the enthusiasm it can garner, and the vision it can produce to guide us into fresh ways to share the love of God in Christ in this place and beyond.

Some things go without saying. Asking God to provide our vision of ministry is not one of them. We ask, we seek, and we will find. That's reason to talk—first among ourselves and then with the rest of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

February 15, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Radiant God, source of eternal light and life, you surrounded Jesus with your glory and sent him into our world to illumine our darkness. You have surrounded us with such a great cloud of witnesses, the prophets and apostles of old as well as faithful saints of our own time, that we might follow their example of devotion and service. You reveal your love to us in such abundance that we cannot keep track of the gifts that are ours each day. In our moments of worship and as we go out into your world to do the work to which you have called us, may our hearts be filled with gratitude and may our lives reflect the generous blessings we have received from you.

Even as we seek the light of your presence, Holy God, we confess that we are sometimes reluctant to allow your grace to shine in every corner of our lives. Sometimes your call catches us off guard and exposes our weakness. We would often choose the limelight while you call us to explore the shadows and brighten the dark places of our world. We seek the spectacular while you bind up the broken in countless acts of humility and mercy. We wish to stay on the mountain in order to keep you to ourselves or to make our dwelling in our comfortable pews or familiar neighborhoods while you ask us to walk alongside you in valleys of pain and pathways of need.

Gracious God, fill us with light and courage to carry your good news into all the corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence. The needs of our community and world are so numerous they overwhelm us, but we know that our gifts touch these needs, and that the greatest gift we can give is to love the world with your transforming, sacrificial love. Remind us, O God, that because we have encountered Christ, we have been changed. We have seen the Light of the World, and we cannot keep silent, so grant us, we pray, the courage to share the good news of your grace with the world you love and for which you sent your Son and our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards
Associate Minister