

Don't Understand. Listen

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Year C: Transfiguration: Luke 9:28-36

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶ 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.

This is a text not to be understood, but to be heard. Direct experiences of God can be overwhelming, terrifying, comforting, awesome. God is God. Humans are not. Yet, we are commanded to Listen to Jesus.

Transfiguration. Shiny! Light! Glory! Wonder! Complete and utter terror. Humanity and divinity existing in the same space momentarily, and yet not at all equal in that space. It seems to me this story is not to be understood, but to stand under. We can imagine Jesus healing a child who is sick, teaching in the temple, getting in an argument with the Pharisees. But His appearance changed? His clothes so bright it was hard to look at him? Men who never died – Moses and Elijah – reappearing on top of a mountain? It sounds mystical, awe-some, divine, majestic and maybe even a little weird.

Moses and Elijah from the Old Testament, represent 2 biblical giants. Moses is the lawgiver. God used Moses to give the original 10 commandments to God's people. Elijah; representing all the prophets. They were both expected to return in some form before Messiah arrived. Hear the words of the prophet Malachi: Elijah will return before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. (4:5-6) what that means is when Messiah arrives, the turn of the ages has finally come. In Jesus, God will finally act to redeem God's people and the world.

The text says they were talking to Jesus about his upcoming departure. Maybe Moses and Elijah got a text about Jesus turning his face towards Jerusalem. Maybe they saw a video on TikTok. Who knows the divine communication system! But these two biblical giants are speaking to Jesus about his departure. His death on the cross, His resurrection, his final ascension. God in Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the law and the prophets! This is the great moment when God will act again.

Up on the mountain, Jesus' appearance was changed. The Greek word for transfigured is metamorphothe. We use the word, metamorphosis like a Caterpillar changing into a butterfly. His clothes became dazzling white. Another version of this story says they were whiter than any fuller could bleach them. He was shiny! Think about the sun when it's about 10 minutes before it sets. You're driving in your car and there is so much light you can barely see the stop lights or cars in front of you. It's almost terrifying.

Because of this glory the disciples get sleepy. It's hard for them to stay awake. And then this cloud comes. it overshadows them they can't see their way through it! Is it cold? Is it warm? Is it fog as thick as pea soup? They probably had no idea where it came from! And the text says they are terrified!

Have you ever been terrified? Sitting in a scary movie doesn't really count. Have you ever been terrified? They don't know what to do. they don't know what to think. they don't know what's happening. When we get terrified, the animal part of our brain reaches up and slows our thinking down. In this moment, clearly they are small human beings in the face of all of this divine transformation. They simply cannot enter in and even begin to process what is happening.

This is one of those Bible stories that leaves us with more questions than answers. We get to simply listen to it and be in awe.

There are moments in our lives when we are certain without a doubt we are in the presence of Almighty God. They are moments that take our breath away. They are moments that we're keenly aware of God's power in contrast to our tiny, small lives. Perhaps we sing and shout. Perhaps we feel God in some part of our body, like our heart or stomach. Maybe the sacred compels us into absolute silence.

Our experiences of God can be mysterious, illusive, confusing, or exciting. Yet they are not to be discounted. That mission trip moment when you said, 'Ahh!' The feeling you get when you think your deceased spouse is nearby. When you wonder if an angel protected you from that crazy driver. These experiences of God and God's magnificent work in our lives are significant.

Know that you are not alone. Church fathers and mothers have been writing about their experiences of God for ages. Hildegard of Bingen was a Christian mystic who lived in the 12th century. In her book Scivias where she illustrated of her visions of God she says this, "I spoke and wrote these things not by the invention of my heart or that of any other person, but as by the secret mysteries of God I heard and received them in the heavenly places. And again I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me, 'Cry out therefore, and write thus!'"

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hildegard_of_Bingen)

When God reveals Godself to us, it is often in brief moments that are so potent we remember it for the rest of our lives. We want these moments. We long for instants when God shows Godself to us! God who is distant comes near and we glimpse the Almighty. They are Mountain Top Glory moments. God is powerful. God is Almighty. God is formidable. God is intimate. God is ultimately Unknowable.

If you're sitting there listening and you think to yourself I've never had any kind of experience close to what she's talking about. Know that there is nothing wrong with you at all! God created each of us with different kinds of spirituality. None of which are right or wrong. We can still come to be in God's presence through scripture reading, worship, service, reading of theological books. All of those are incredibly faithful ways to be in God's presence.

Which leads me to what God the father says to the disciples. "this is my son, the beloved, listen to him!"

You and I were not on the mountain with Jesus. Whether we've even come close to experiencing God in such a glorious way, all of us... every day... walk by faith and not sight. The command is to listen to Jesus. We don't have to understand. We can ask all the questions we want and still not get answers. God asks us to listen to Jesus. We listen with our ears. We listen with our minds. We listen with our heart and our spirit. As we listen God will do God's work in us whether we know it or not. What does it take to listen?

Coming to worship and praying a prayer of being open to God's presence. Opening our Bible and praying a prayer of being open to God's presence. Doing a service project and praying a prayer of being open to God's presence. Just Listen.

The disciples were absolutely changed as they came off that mountain. And they kept listening to Jesus. So shall we! Amen.