

Transfiguration of Our Lord Year B 2021

February 14, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's world is full of noise. Urban areas live with the constant hum of traffic on the highway, car horns and alarms. Even in our more rural part of the world, the sound of cars is not uncommon. In offices, we live with the noise of printers, keyboards, colleagues or visitors, and the hum of white noise in the background from machines, lights, heaters and more. In our homes we live with the constant distraction of TV, children, cooking, appliances, and running water. Our lives are noisy. Even when we venture out into the "great outdoors" for a time of respite from our noisy world, there is still noise around us and inside us. Our minds replay the noise and distractions of life, and we re-live the various sounds of the day. Our lives are filled with noise, and even in silence, our mind finds ways to fill the void.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus left the noise of the city and the crowds, and he went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. Jesus had been inundated with noise. In just last week's Gospel reading, when Jesus healed Peter's mother in law, we heard that the whole city was crowded around the door, brining all who were sick or possessed with demons. And even when Jesus left early in the morning to pray, Peter and the others came and looked for him, disturbing his silence. This event occurred still very early in Jesus' ministry, and certainly things got louder and more crowded from there, to the point where we reach today's transfiguration story, with Jesus and a few of his disciples alone on the mountaintop.

Jesus led Peter, James and John, to a quiet place where they could be by themselves. As they journeyed up the mountain, maybe they felt a relief from stress, their burdens lifted, their souls feeling more settled. Then, on the mountaintop, in the silence, an amazing transfiguration occurred, and the disciples again experienced the presence of God. The disciples saw Jesus in dazzling white clothes, surrounded in light, and talking to Moses and Elijah. It must have been an incredible experience, one that would leave most people speechless, stunned in silence. *Except for Peter.* Poor, beloved Peter, filled with terror, had to break the silence. And when he did so, the vision disappeared; the experience ended. Peter had interrupted the conversation with God.

Perhaps we can relate to Peter. We find ourselves busy with all kinds of things. Even during the pandemic, we are busy with our homes, errands, planning for the future, caring for friends and family members, reaching out in service to others, and so much more. And certainly, many of these actions are important. Many of the things we do are part of God's holy work that we have been called to do. Many of the things we do are part of our ministry to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to the world around us. So, these actions are important. Doing ministry, and taking action is at the heart of being a Christian. However, we also need to be careful that these actions do not interrupt our conversation with God. We cannot effectively be "servants of God" if we ourselves are not nurtured. We cannot be messengers of the Gospel if we ourselves do not take the time to read scripture and listen to God's word. It is in our prayers, and in the silent times with God, that we regain our strength and see the presence of God.

There's a book called, The Word is Very Near You, by Martin Smith, that describes prayer as a conversation. Smith writes, "Preachers have a habit of urging us to listen to God's voice, but we seldom get any guidance about what this listening is supposed to consist in." We pray, and then, in silence, we listen. But listening is not an easy task. Perhaps you remember this from the times of extended silence in our midweek Advent services. Before we can hear, we

must first address the issues and concerns of our hearts. Smith describes his process by saying, “In order to clearly hear the Holy Words of God, I must first pray, my clumsy, inadequate prayer, and then I must go through my laundry list of listening. My mind goes through the events of the day, what I should be doing instead of praying and what I will be doing after I complete this prayer. Finally, after I have gone through this mental exercise of mental gymnastics, I hear the silence. It is only in that place of quietness in my soul and in my mind, I can actually have a conversation with God. I am now ready.”

Similarly, in one of the classes I took for continuing education last year, the leader suggested that we start every session of sermon writing, every session of reading scripture, and most any reflection-based task by first taking a few minutes to settle our minds. She called this the “brain dump”: jotting down every distracting thought that comes to mind—your to-dos, worries, ideas, or anything else that prevents you from devoting your full attention to the present task. We were instructed to dump these things out of our brains and into a journal, calendar, or scrap of paper so that they could be dealt with at a different time.

A similar approach can be helpful for prayer, as we’re preparing to enter into conversation with God. Praying is not an easy task. It takes practice, time and patience. We cannot rush through our prayers and expect to hear God or experience the Holy Spirit in the few seconds we leave for transition time. The Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 27, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.” Waiting for God is not an easy task, and only when we stop and listen, do we have the opportunity to hear God in the silence.

Waiting for God means being available to God in silence, meditating on the Word of God, seeking a deeper meaning and understanding of God in our lives. God *is* available and present with each of us. God is *already* speaking. But like the disciples, sometimes we need a reminder from God, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Amidst the noise of our world and the noise that our minds create, we are reminded again today to also take time for silence and listening.

The prophet Elijah also heard the voice of God in silence. Just a few chapters before today’s reading, Elijah went to stand on a mountain to wait for God to pass by. As Elijah waited, there was a great wind, but God was not speaking in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not speaking in the earthquake; then a fire, but God was not speaking in the fire. Then, after the fire, there was the sound of sheer silence, and in the silence, God spoke to Elijah. It was in silence that Elijah was prepared to receive the word of God.

Prayer is the most powerful means that we have to communicate with God. Listening in the silence, we just might hear God, like Peter, James, and John did at the transfiguration. It is important to engage in ministry and service in the world, but we must also make time to wait for the Lord, so that we can be strengthened, rejuvenated, and encouraged by God’s word. God *is* speaking to us. God *is* present with us. God *is* at work in us. God *is* guiding our lives. As we listen for God in prayer, God will help us better understand God’s voice in our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.