

Sermon – Mar 5, 2023 – Lent 2

7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,
“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Listen to him.

I am going to talk about listening today...

What does it mean, to listen to our Lord and how do we do it?

But first our Gospel is about a mountain-top experience! Jesus takes Peter, James and John and leads them up a mountain.

I wonder how many of you have climbed a mountain?

A number of years ago I climbed 2 different mountains in Baxter State Park in Maine. Climbing was not what I had imagined it would be. It was not strolling along a gently inclined cleared path while laughing and chatting. Climbing was a struggle! It was physically demanding...we were out of breath, we sweated, we pulled one another over great boulders, we did clever footwork to get over rough, rocky inclines. Muscles ached. We were thirsty and then we were hungry.

Reaching the top was exhilarating...the beauty was breathtaking from such a height! But it was also terrifying. I felt as if I was going to fall off. I clung tightly to whatever I could clutch. My heart jumped when others seemed ‘close to the edge’.

These memories provide some insight into ‘mountaintop experiences’. They are tough work and scary. No wonder Peter didn’t know what to say! No wonder he was terrified! Perhaps Jesus, Peter, James and John had a rough climb, a rocky path, which made them wheeze and gasp for breath. Getting close to the Divine is not very comfortable.

There is a mountain climber’s proverb which says:

When you reach the mountaintop, you’re only half-way

Mountain climbers know they’ve got to go back down. They cannot stay on the mountain forever. We tend to think only of getting to the top of the mountain... of the exhilaration when we behold God in his creation face-to-face. But the journey is not over. We must also descend. We must return to our lives...to the familiar, sometimes tedious daily grind.

The message is the same for us though...as it was for Peter, James and John who heard it coming from behind a great cloud.

The message from God is “Listen to Him.”

This is my Son, my chosen, Listen to Him.

How did Peter, James and John listen to Him? They had their challenges.

Is it a challenge for us to hear our Lord’s voice? How do we listen to Him?

Well...couldn’t you say that we go to the top of the mountain every time we worship? This makes us ‘mountain’ people. We are not plains people. We are called to journey up the mountain in worship; we look to encounter the mysterious, holy presence. We are looking for something beyond ourselves that we can’t explain. One of My favourite Christian songs says
“You are beyond description, beyond belief...

no one could ever contain you, ever explain you...

you are a Masterpiece.

When we worship, our Lord, the Masterpiece, he is present in the Scriptures. Through the sacred word, our Lord is revealed to us. Christ is also present and active in the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion ...when we receive the bread and the wine which is our Lord’s body and blood. When we worship, Christ is also present in others...present when we greet one another .

But when worship is over ...how do we listen to him?

Well...I’m going to suggest one way...of listening to him..., and that is by listening to others and by doing so, discovering Christ in others...

Maybe this Lent, ... we can practice the discipline of listening, really listening to understand the other. If we can do that, if we can listen closely, without our own personal agenda, then maybe we will hear and see and love Christ in the other.

Our Lord gave us a new commandment at the Last Supper. This new commandment is...to love one another as He loves us. If we listen to that...then listening to understand the other, is a powerful way of loving that person. Jesus loves us that very way. Jesus is always listening. Jesus understands us. There are no secrets hidden from him.

Often we do not listen just to understand. We listen to reply. We are preparing to speak as we are listening...maybe right now, many of you are wishing you could jump up and reply to me.

We read our own experiences into other peoples. We say "Oh, I know exactly how you feel!" "I went through the very same thing. Let me tell you about my experience."

Suppose you've been having trouble with your eyes and you decide to go to an optometrist for help. After briefly listening to your complaint, he takes off his glasses and hands them to you saying

"You need glasses. Put these on. These glasses have really helped me. I have an extra pair at home; you can wear these."

So you put them on, but it only makes the problem worse.

"This is terrible!" you exclaim. "I can't see a thing!"

"Well, what's wrong?" he asks. "They work great for me. Try harder."

"I am trying," you insist. "Everything is a blur. I need different glasses"

"Well, what's the matter with you? Think positively."

"Okay. I positively can't see a thing."

What are the chances you'd go back to that optometrist the next time you needed help? Not very good. You don't have much confidence in someone who doesn't listen. But how often do we think we have the solution before we really hear what the problem is?

Steven Covey, a committed Christian, in his best selling book 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' says "When another person speaks, we're usually "listening" at one of four levels.

We may be ignoring another person, not really listening at all.

We may practice pretending. "yeah. Uh-huh. Right."

We may practice selective listening, hearing only certain parts of the conversation. We often do this when we're listening to the constant chatter of a young child. Or we may even practice attentive listening, paying attention and focusing energy on the words that are being said.

But very few of us ever practice the fifth level, the highest form of listening...listening purely to understand."

Steven Covey's conclusion is that the single most important principle in the field of interpersonal relations, is to

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood." This may seem as challenging as climbing a mountain...but when you do manage to understand another and that other feels it...it is holy ground, and God is surely as present there as he is in the glory at the top of the mountain.

Such listening gets inside another person's frame of reference. Native people have a saying: 'walk a mile in my moccasins'. Listening like this is listening not only with our ears, but also with our hearts. It's listening for feelings. You use every thing you have - your senses, your intuitions and your feelings.

Listening because we want to understand the other, is a powerful way of loving that person and it's a powerful way of finding Christ. Many times, by listening...we are blessed by what we hear and healed ourselves.

Jesus descended the mountain, returning to his work in the world and so must we. But before we go, we enter God's presence on this worship mountain top of word and sacrament. As Peter said, "it is good for us to be here." We can echo the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, another mountain top traveler. He said,

"I have been to the mountain top, I just want to do God's will. God has allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over and I've seen the promised land, so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything, I'm not fearing anyone, for my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

God is present here among us, in his Word, in the sacramental bread of life and cup of salvation, and in us, God's holy people. God is present with us, encouraging us, energizing us. God will empower us to go out from this place and point others to God's light.

So, like Martin Luther King, be on the mountain top.

Do God's will.

Look over and see the land of promise.

Be happy today.

Don't worry about anything.

Don't fear anyone.

Let your eyes see the glory of the coming of the Lord. Amen.