

“Let Your Light Shine”
2 Corinthians 4:3-6;
Psalm 50:1-6; Mark 9:2-9

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

As we come this day, how’s it going? How is it following Jesus in these times?

It can be somewhat of a struggle these days, I think, because we are struggling in this world. There’s a way in which it feels like this virus has occupied our land, our lives, and changed the way we have to do things. We recognize it is to try to help keep each other safe, and yet, we long for those times when we don’t feel that force pushing us apart. We long for times that felt more normal.

In the midst of that, there are the other struggles in our lives. The divisions in our nation and the concerns that we face each day. So, how’s it going following Jesus through all this?

I wonder if there wasn’t some similarity with what was happening with Peter, and James, and John. They had been following Jesus. They had become his disciples. As they were walking with him, they were beginning to recognize some things. There was some conflict beginning to arise between Jesus and the Pharisees and other religious and political groups—the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Herodians. They were in a land that was occupied by Rome and they weren’t completely free to do what they wanted to do. Perhaps they had to take care what they did and how they acted to be careful for others.

Perhaps they were a little confused about exactly what Jesus was up to. Peter had just told Jesus he was the Messiah, and a little bit later had been told he was acting as Satan. There is this struggle going for Peter as he is trying to understand how to follow Jesus. So when Jesus invited them to go up the mountain, I suspect that all they were thinking about was that Jesus goes off in the wilderness to pray. He goes up the mountain to find some solitude. Perhaps they were just going with him to pray. I’m pretty sure they were not expecting what happened. As they thought about their Messiah, perhaps they were thinking he was simply going to change all their concerns and struggles, throw the Romans out, and give them a peaceful life.

Instead, they go up the mountain with him and what do they find? This incredible experience of Jesus shining brightly. Our Corinthians passage suggested that he shined with the glory of God. So they saw in him something they didn’t expect.

As Jesus revealed the righteousness of God and the power of God through that transfiguration, it was a bit overwhelming for the disciples. Then, Moses and Elijah showed up. This is an incredible experience for these disciples. I wonder if, in seeing Elijah and Moses, they were reminded that there are good folks who do God's will, and that they had those folks in their own history. Perhaps somehow this was a reminder that in Jesus they were seeing this again. They were seeing God come among them. They were seeing a way in which the peace, power, and purpose of God was being given to them.

It was a moment that was overwhelming. Peter was terrified, and yet, he felt the necessity of speaking. Since he was terrified, it must have been somewhat of a habit, a way of dealing with an unusual situation. Perhaps it was a habit that came from the ways he dealt with situations. It's interesting what he said. The first thing he said was, "Lord, it's good for us to be here." That habit of interjecting our own way of seeing things, of trying to bring ourselves up to being on par with or giving advice to a situation. This is one of those overwhelming situations, and yet, that habit seemed to flow out of Peter.

First he wanted to assess the situation and give his opinion of how it was. It was good for them to be there. Then, he wanted to be able to do something. He wanted to be able to build some tabernacles, some tents for those who were there. Perhaps it was a way of saying, "This situation is a little overwhelming. Let's contain you guys. We don't really want you to go away, but it's overwhelming." In any case, he wanted to *do* something. It feels so human. First to want to bring ourselves into the situation and show that we have something to offer, to say, to engage, and make ourselves part of what's going on, and maybe even show some control in the situation, to be right. And then, that need to do something. To be able to show that we can solve a problem, move to do something.

It's amazing that when the cloud comes over, first it identifies for them who Jesus is—the Son of God, the Beloved. It makes me wonder how often we really struggle even with Jesus. Telling him, "It's good for us to be here. We've got something to say. We've got something you should listen to. We understand how you should do this. If you would just do this a little differently." That identification of Jesus as God's son should elevate his status a bit.

The second part of what God says is, "Listen to him." I wonder if for someone like Peter—who seemed to have that habit of wanting to interject his opinion, his way, his "good for us to be here," his assessment of the situation, what he might offer—to sit back and simply listen to Jesus, to pay attention. This idea of listening means listening with comprehension. Sometimes when we are talking with others it is so easy to not really be listening, but to be thinking about what

we're going to say next. Do we do that even with Jesus? As we're struggling with all that is going on around us, how hard is it to simply listen to Jesus? To listen instead of complaining? To listen instead of telling Jesus the way it should be? To listen and hear what Jesus might have to say to us?

As this passage comes to a conclusion, they begin back down into the valley after this mountain top experience, an experience of hearing God's voice, of recognizing Jesus shining forth as one who shows God's peace, power and purpose. As they recognize that they have to go back down into the valley, back down into the struggles of their daily lives, back down into the occupation of the Romans, back down into the conflict with the Pharisees, Jesus tells them, "Don't tell anybody about this until later, until I've risen."

It is a time for listening, continually listening to what Jesus is teaching them and how he is guiding them. It makes me wonder as I go through each day, what am I listening to? It's awfully easy to get caught up in listening to news, or listening to a podcast, or listening to music, or listening to all kinds of other things. But how often do I stop and listen to Jesus? How often do I pull out the scripture and look at it? How often do I hear what he has to say? How often do I stop to pray, and in that prayer take time to listen?

As we go into Lent, we are invited in some ways, to return to the valley, to recognize that God may not answer everything the way we want, may not address our problems and concerns as we would plan for God to do. The powers, propaganda, and purposes of the world may blind us to the good news Jesus brings. So we are invited again to recognize our own experiences of God's grace or God's glory, our sense of awe and wonder of who God is. I suspect most of us have not had that transfiguration kind of experience, and yet have felt the touch, the presence, the wonder of who God is, and in some way identifying and engaging with Jesus. Then, in this experience, hearing our invitation to listen to him.

So in the midst of our lives with all our concerns, can we do this? Can we listen to him? Can we give him the right to be the voice we pay attention to, and who will reveal the way forward? Lent will challenge us to listen to him and to see if we're listening. It will challenge us to take a good look at our struggle with listening to Jesus and trusting in him, with a purpose in sight, that we might overcome our temptation.

Can we listen to Jesus? Will we let his light shine in our lives and see the good news that he brings? We are invited to listen. Amen.