

Listen to him

First Congregational Church Branford

3/3/19; Matthew 17:1-8

Rev. Suzanne Personette

The prologue to today's scripture reading is that six days earlier Jesus had foretold of his death and resurrection to the disciples. Then,

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Transfigure means to transform into something more beautiful or elevated. I hope each of you leave this morning with even more light in you such that others can truly see and receive your essence - *who you really are* - because you stood before the holy God today - you stood before all this light and was transformed.

The disciples stood before the holy Lord on that mountain!

Six days prior Jesus had told them he would undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and on the third day be raised. He told them that not only would his followers have to witness these things, they would be called to go and spread his message of all-inclusive love, which was going to mean they too would endure rejection and suffering. In 2019, it's hard to believe that all-inclusive love is still a radical message, that *God loves everyone*, no matter their religion, lack of religion, their sexuality, gender, politics, socio-economic status. In 30AD, the belief was that God only loved the Jews, and Rome had their own gods, so it was a dangerous message to say that *the Hebrew God loved everyone*. That's what Jesus was about. Well, because Jesus said such hard things to the disciples, they had a hard time listening to him - things like, you're going to suffer!, which is indeed what happened to the early Christians.

Six days after he told them they would all suffer, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, *who may have been his inner circle*, up on a mountain and Jesus shone like the sun so that Peter, James, and John could see *his* true essence. Here is the Messiah! *Then*, Moses and Elijah appeared, 2 great Hebrew prophets and leaders - no doubt talking with Jesus about what was to come in Jerusalem. The disciples saw the **glow** of this great vision, the appearance of Moses - dead for 1200 years, the appearance of Elijah - dead for 900 years. And, you would think, wouldn't you, that Peter, James, and John would be dumbstruck and awed by all of this glory, fall on their knees and say "Oh, my Lord, and my Life, I will follow you until the end of my days, and I will do your will always."

Well... not so much!

Instead of allowing themselves to be blessed by this epiphany, they *busied* themselves with how they could capitalize on it, and build a monument. They wanted to get to work!

When this mountaintop spiritual moment had been for them - to fill up with the light of Jesus for the long, difficult road that Jesus told them was coming. God's like, stop... take this in... Do you see him? God wanted them to see that they could trust in the power of God to get them through; when panic and self-doubt would settle in, they could remember the light of Christ shining on them - to trust and have faith in God, even in times of *great* suffering. He would see them through.

But, what can I say, human beings like to do rather than be, even though we aren't human *doings*. We like to be busy bees - produce, produce, produce. We like that in the church, too. We have our meetings, that's for sure! We have our schedules and our deadlines. We're great doers. Which is one reason Sunday morning is so important, because all you're asked to do... is be. Sometimes church leaders don't come on Sunday morning because the one day they think they can get away from church business, members corner them before, during, or after worship. We should let the Sabbath *be* the Sabbath; call a church leader on Monday. Then, Monday begins what we call the *work* week, where it can be hard to carve out moments to just be - to sit and meditate, or to just sit still with God. Have you experienced the difference it makes to just sit still and breathe for two minutes?... It changes your mind, it changes how you feel. Calming and relaxing makes your whole body function better. It changes everything.

In a much scaled down example of today's story, I think about my son, who turned 18 last Sunday - times in his life when I've been so awed by *his* essence, and instead of basking in the moment, I'd cut it off and tell him to go *do* something, or I'd go *do* something, instead of staying in the moment, allowing myself to be transformed by... *loveliness*. But, no, I'd have to ruin it by saying, Abe, you're being lazy, get to work, or I'd get to work. It's like our brain tells us

there's not as much value in spiritual moments as there is in *getting something done*. We could let ourselves spend more time in moments that let our heart rest, our belly soften, and our spirit be light. When you see something beautiful, let yourself pause... and take it in. Whether it's a person, a sunrise, a sunset, a flower, tonight's snow... just be. Breathe. A little later we'll read a Mary Oliver poem that will hopefully allow us to just be.

Maybe you've come here today caught up in worry, fear, loss, or bickering, maybe you're filled with dread for something you're going to have to confront, maybe you feel guilt for something dishonest you've done; maybe you haven't been paying attention to your life, and God says, *look at this sanctuary I have provided for you, a safe haven from the troubles of the world, the troubles in your life. This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him. Receive from him for your journey. Don't do your laundry list. Stop. Jesus is here for you now – in this very important hour. He'll change everything.*

I remember I got a "Listen to him" moment of a different sort one night after I'd put young Abe to bed at 8:00, and as I was just getting invested in American Idol twenty minutes later or so, I heard him running back and forth overhead. I went to the bottom of the stairs and yelled up, "Abraham, what's going on, go to bed." He said, "Can you come up here?" I rolled my eyes as I knew this was some ploy. We went on like this for a minute – and then, he said, "I need to speak with you privately." I still didn't trust this, and was now annoyed for missing these minutes of the results show of American Idol. I went up, *sighing*. I re-tucked him into bed and asked what was bothering him. He told me what he was worried about, and I set his mind to rest. I said to think about trains, legos, the beach, Grandma Jody, the piano, and then I said, "these are the kinds of things you need to start telling yourself in order to soothe yourself." I went on about that, how he could do this for himself, when he said loud and clear, "But, I'm still a child!" I remember I thought, listen to him! I plopped right back on his bed. And, comforted my child. I told him all the wonderful things there are about him. When I finished speaking I went up to his face and his eyes had watered, and I asked him why and he said, "because of all the things you said about me."

That's what Sunday morning can be – God commands us to keep the Sabbath so that we can listen to how God feels about us, that we are precious to him, and that He is here, with us. And will see us through our suffering.

When God spoke out of the clouds to listen to Jesus, the disciples fell to the ground, and they were afraid. But, Jesus, so gentle, goes to them, touches them; he understands our human ways and reassures us, the way a parent needs to reassure a child, and says, *do not be afraid*. When they looked up, it was just their Jesus they knew and loved, and their hearts were calmed. Jesus changes everything.

Listen to him.

As we approach the season of Lent, may you experience some moment of God's glory to fill you for whatever lies ahead. Amen.